Comedy & Country Music • *Boston Common* • A Defense of Hillbilly Humor

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

THE CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES • EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
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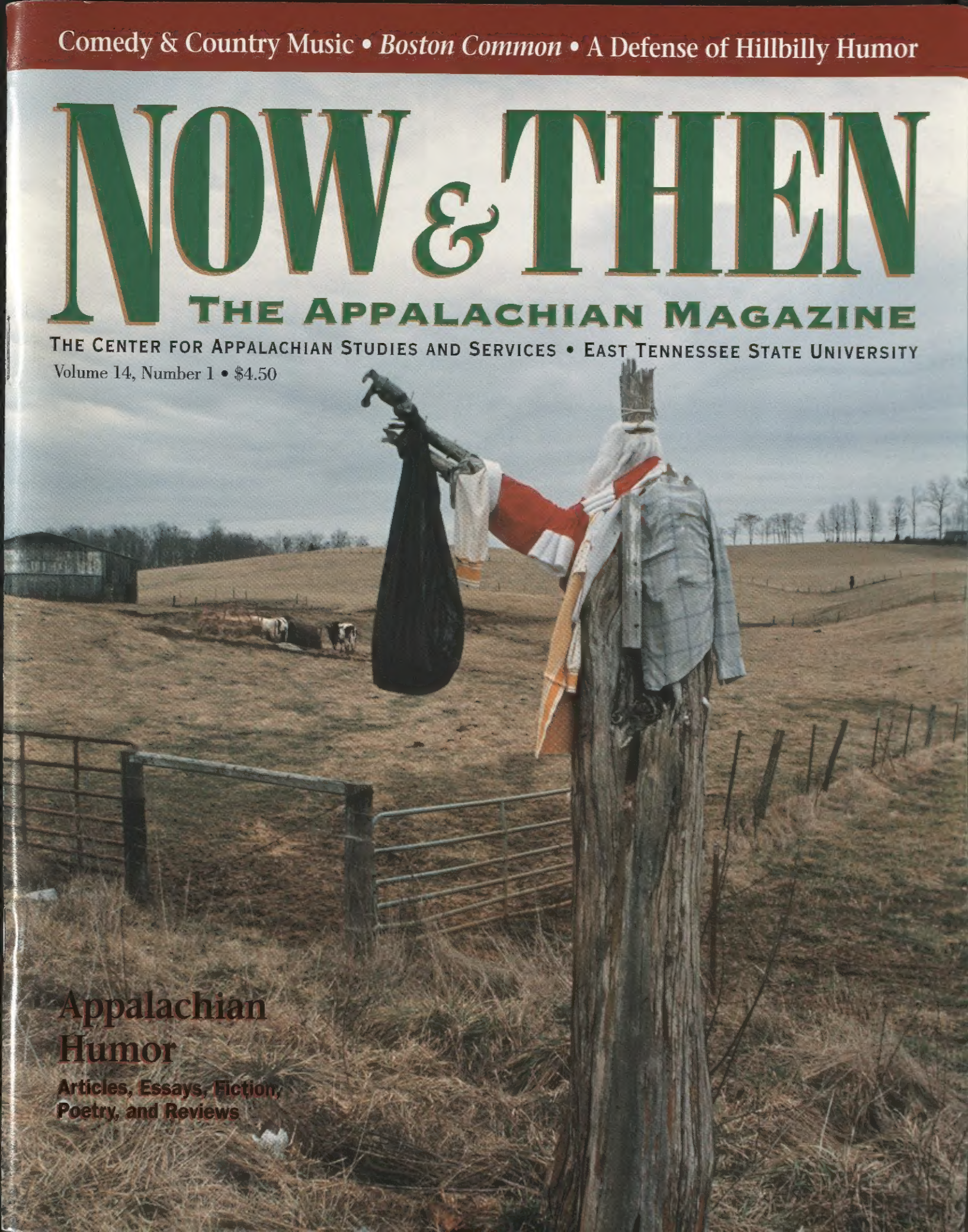

Appalachian Humor

Articles, Essays, Fiction, Poetry, and Reviews

The Case of the Missing Dentures

Did I tell you about finding my partial?
It was in that old white car of mine
That Johnny had afixing.
Three hundred dollars they cost me. Boy,
I never was so glad to see a thing.
That Johnny he's a good boy, my nephew, you know,
Goes to work there at seven but always comes early
And always goes two, three miles out of the way
From his place to mine to bring me to town
Ever' morning since that old car broke down
Three months ago. He tried to fix it
But didn't have parts like it needed
And I didn't have no money for them
Nor for new teeth nor nothing else much,
But he's a damned good mechanic, that Johnny is,
And as soon as enough of my checks come through
He dragged that car down here into town
And went to repairing after work
So's I wouldn't have to pay labor,
Me going to have to pay for teeth, too,
Or starve to death.
But there they was up under the dashboard –
Damned if I know how they got there –
When he went to connect some loose-hanging wires
And found them and my extra set of keys
And the earrings I was fixing to give Maudie,
But she died.
And a dog's collar that had never been wore
And a bag of cookies that the old Widow Stemple
Give me when I brung her to town last Christmas.
I can't abide her, though, nor any other old woman
Who's looking for a man what can nail down her roof
And clean out her outhouse.
Hell, old Saint Paul said that singles should stay single
And I believe everything that old Saint Paul said,
Though I can't find nothing in him about TV
Or cooking deer meat in a microwave oven,
Which I'm have to consider, I'm right like to try,
Now that I've found my false teeth.

—Barbara Smith

Former chair of the division of the humanities and professor of literature and writing at Alderson-Broaddus College, Philippi, W.Va, Barbara Smith is now a free-lance writer and editor. She has produced over 200 published poems, stories, and journal articles in addition to one novel and seven books of nonfiction.

Cover Photo: "Post Man" by Alice Anthony, taken near Limestone, Tenn. Cover layout by Jane Hillhouse.

Spring 1997
Volume 14, Number 1

NOW & THEN
THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

"Appalachian humor, it seems to me, has reason to be wry."
— Edwina Pendarvis

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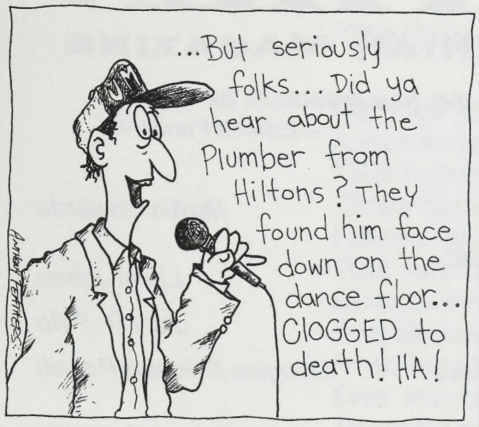
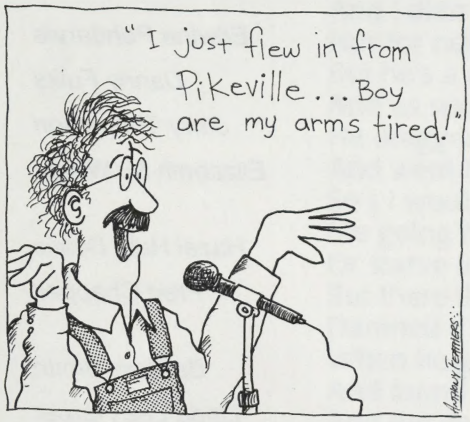
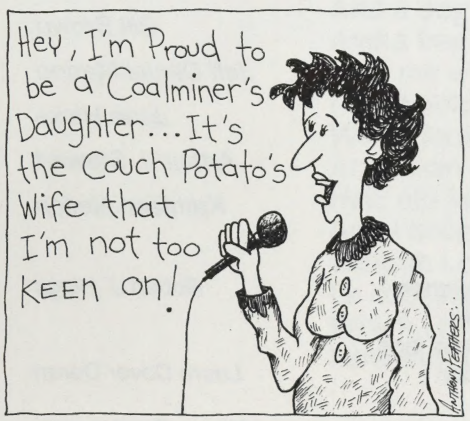

...But seriously folks... Did ya hear about the Plumber from Hiltons? They found him face down on the dance floor... CLOGGED to death! HA!
Anthony Feathers





STAND-UPS OF THE BLUE RIDGE

Cartoons by Anthony Feathers have graced the pages of *Now & Then* for most of the life of the magazine. The Greeneville, Tenn., cartoonist is featured in "Twisted Humor: The Cartoons of Anthony Feathers" on page 27.

Marginal Humor

The humor found in these pages comes mostly from the minds of hillbilly professionals — not to be confused, certainly, with professional hillbillies.

They are highly educated: a distinguished poet and novelist, teachers and professors, journalists, a pioneering Appalachian Studies scholar, to name just a few. So it's not surprising that much of the humor takes a look at what happens when hillbillies and aging yuppies bump into each other. Often these "educated hillbillies," to steal a phrase from humorist Carl Hurley, sit on the borderline between two cultures. As scholar Robert J. Higgs has said of cartoonist and art teacher Anthony Feathers, they take note of ironic detail where stereotypes collide.

Feathers reveals the closely guarded secret that hillbillies are really yuppies in disguise, debating the pros and cons of pastoral rusticity versus urbanization and scanning *The Wall Street Journal.* Of course, he is playing with the fact that *ignorant* and *hillbilly* are often treated as if they were one word. In "Snakehandling," Fred Chappell shows what happens when the practice of snakehandling, a practice that is synonymous with Appalachia in the minds of some, makes an unexpected appearance at a writers' conference. The attendees, it is safe to say, don't welcome the unexpected chance to experience a slice of Appalachian life.

Then Jack Pyle in "Movies, Fame, and Fortune" provides a bemused account of a real-life culture clash. A film crew headed by a city girl from California arrives in the Western Carolina mountains loaded down with lots of sophisticated equipment and a set of unsophisticated, completely erroneous assumptions about what it is they are about to document.

Some of the writers deal with the question: to fit in or not to fit in. And if you're going to try to fit in, just how far are you willing to go? It's a quandary that cuts both ways. During the interview for "Twisted Humor," Feathers remembers trying to change his Northeast Tennessee accent when he first got a taste of life among his largely Yankee college classmates at Tusculum College, just outside Greeneville, Tenn. Elizabeth Wright, on the other hand, came down from Long Island to the University of Virginia and tried to blend in by reacquiring the Southern accent of her childhood.

Much of the humor in this issue, then, arises out of what Douglas Reichert Powell calls, in his meditation on the television program *Boston Common,* "the complicated, unwieldy, and often unpleasant story of the relationship between the Appalachian margin and the centers of American culture." The relationship between the margin and the center is colored by the fact that people with only a nodding acquaintance with Appalachia have such peculiar, and often less than kind, ideas about the region's people and life. The result, says Edwina Pendarvis in "They Talk About Fractions," is that much of the Appalachian humor generated by Appalachians themselves is at least slightly twisted. It is a wry strain that "twists and hides part of the truth — relying on an ironic self-deprecation that is really a much needed self-affirmation."

I sent out queries to people throughout the region, asking for ideas for this issue. They responded generously, and I have many people to thank.

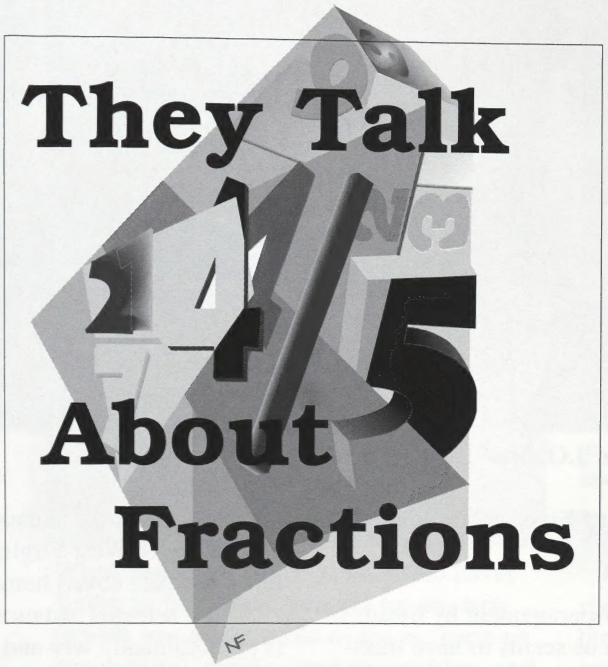
Wayne Winkler, general manager of WETS-FM, the National Public Radio station in Johnson City, Tenn., reminded us that country music acts nearly always included comedy. Higgs, *Now & Then* book review editor Sandy Ballard, and poet Rita Quillen all agreed that "Loyal Jones is a must for this issue." Jones, fortunately, came forward on his own and allowed that he could "probably do something on the comedy associated with country music." He also suggested we interview professional humorist Carl Hurley.

Advisory board member Bill Kovach volunteered *Tennessean* columnist Jerry Thompson to write about hillbilly humor, and Thompson graciously obliged. Finally, Sandy brought Chappell's laugh-out-loud story "Snakehandling" to our attention.

Our thanks to one and all.

— Jane Harris Woodside

They Talk About Fractions



Like most families — Appalachian and otherwise — my mother and her brothers have an ongoing joke. The gist of this joke is how badly the brothers treat each other. The men, all over 60, call their sister periodically with mock complaints. As the oldest, she listens to their tattling. With a straight face and a gentle, conciliatory tone, she offers each one consolation for the mistreatment he has suffered at the hands of the others.

Typically, their complaints are pleased but disguised exaggerations of the way they care for each other. My uncle J.O., aged 73, has undergone several serious operations for different kinds of cancer. He complains, "My brothers won't let me alone." They appear at his doorstep so frequently, he says, that he can't get his work done. Both of his complaints are ironic: He loves having his brothers come by, and he can't do much work anyway because of his physical condition.

Their complaints are also self-deprecatory. J.O., Fon, and Donald love to talk about popular ideas in science, such as chaos theory and fractal geometry. Recently Bennett, a retired coal analyst who's just as sharp as they are, called his sister to complain that his brothers were treating him especially badly: "They ignore me and talk over my head," he said. "They talk about fractions."

The wry form of this mild family teasing is common in the region, though it's certainly not exclusively Appalachian. Its wryness is usually achieved through a combination of self-effacing exaggeration and understatement. My uncles understate their admirable qualities — love for each other and intelligence, for example — by overstating their sibling rivalry or their stupidity. The wry quality of their humor is heightened by their straight-faced delivery (ironically, since one meaning of *wry* is "crooked.")

The word *wry* seems to have at least three lines of meaning. Among the obsolete meanings given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for *wry* as a verb are "to conceal, to cover, or to protect." It has also meant "to move or go forward." Today, wry as a verb means "to twist or to bend"; as an adjective, it is used to describe something twisted, bent, or crooked. Often, it is associated with sadness, disgust, or bitterness, as in a wry smile twisted by a mitigating, unpleasant emotion.

Edwina Pendarvis

Appalachian humor, it seems to me, has reason to be wry. Literary critic William Empson, in *Seven Types of Ambiguity,* comments that wry humor is a substitute for rebellion against oppression. Feminist scholar Marina Warner, author of *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers,* says that wry humor is a form of rebellion. Perhaps because of the historical and ongoing attacks on the culture and character of Appalachian people, Appalachian humor twists and hides part of the truth — relying on an ironic self-deprecation which is really a much needed self-affirmation.

Recently, when someone jokingly threatened to beat him up, I heard my son-in-law reply quietly, "Well, you'd better pack your lunch." This response implicitly claims it would take all day to do the job. It is indirect, a veiled counterthreat and a boast. This apparently common response to threats neatly combines understatement and exaggeration.

One of my favorite humorous songs is based on a wry concept. "One Piece at a Time," country singer Johnny Cash's 1976 recording about a Kentuckian working in a Cadillac factory in Detroit, gets much of its humor from whimsy. Stealing a car piece by piece over the years in the way the song describes — mostly carried out each day in a big lunch box — would be next to impossible. But the humor is also ironic and self-deprecatory: The worker ends up with a car with three headlights and only one tail fin. This song indirectly acknowledges the indignation suffered by the automobile factory worker who knows this might well be the only way he could own one of the cars he makes for wealthier people. It rebels against this truth with humor.

Perhaps because of the ongoing attacks on the culture and character of Appalachian people, Appalachian humor twists and hides part of the truth.

Appalachian recreational events often use wry humor. Jim Webb of WMMT, the Mountain Community Radio station run by Appalshop, an arts and education center in Whitesburg, Ky., re-

cently hosted his 10th annual Pine Mountain Tacky Lawn Ornament and Pink Flamingo Soiree. The theme of this get-together in Whitesburg reflects an ostensibly self-effacing attitude. Its mock claim is that the people who attend are devotees of lawn kitsch. The claim is funny primarily because it plays off the truth that some people consider Appalachians as appreciative *only* of tacky lawn ornaments, velvet portraits of Elvis, and other unsophisticated forms of art.

Courtesy of Edwina Pendarvis

Donald, Fon, J.O., and Bennett Johnson, 1990.

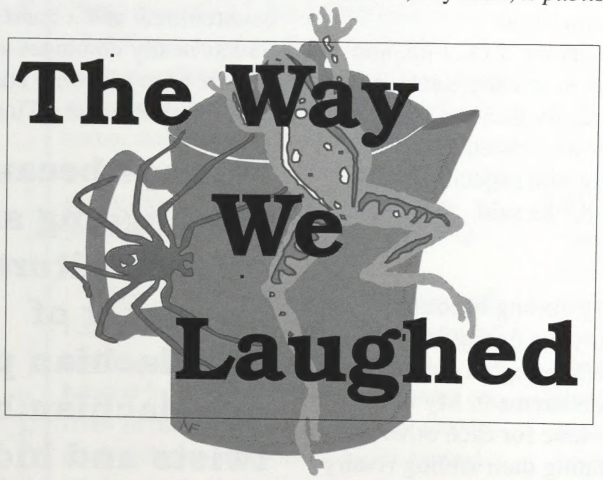
The same impulse to wry self-disparagement by means of flaunting the image foisted on us seems to have motivated the Southern Ohio basketball team that essayist Danny Fulks writes about in his collection, *Tales Along the Appalachian Plateau*. This championship team played at least one game in bib overalls. In a visual joke, they exaggerated their rurality and at the same time proved the detractors of rural culture wrong by showing how these "country boys" could play excellent ball. Appalachian State University's (ASU) hillbilly mascot, described by ASU English professor J.W. Williamson in *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies,* partakes of similar humor. It figuratively throws the stereotype back in the detractors' collective face.

Which reminds me of another uncle: My mother's sister's husband, a salesman in Huntington, W.Va., used to wear a brightly colored Hawaiian print shirt and a loud, clashing tie whenever he attended out-of-state conferences. Playing off stereotypes of West Virginians, he exaggerated his sartorial ignorance and paid covert homage to his roots.

These selected instances don't mean that Appalachian humor is predominantly wry and self-deprecatory. Nevertheless, Appalachian humor *often* asserts our dignity by exaggerating or understating some of the truth about ourselves and covering up another part of it. In this sense, Appalachian humor refuses to tell the whole truth. Like my uncles, it talks about fractions. N&T

Eddy Pendarvis lives in Huntington, W.Va., and teaches at Marshall University. Her work has appeared in Antietam Review, Appalachian Journal, Grab-A-Nickel, Small Pond, Tantra, *and* Wind Magazine. *Her collection,* Joy Ride, *is published by Bottom Dog Press.*

The Way We Laughed



Danny Fulks

I was sitting in a beer joint called the Blue Moon in Wellsville, Ohio. A small town just across from West Virginia on the Ohio River, Wellsville's claim to fame is that in 1934, lawmen there had gunned down Pretty Boy Floyd, a gangster who had spent his career terrorizing the Midwest.

There were maybe half a dozen people in the Blue Moon, including the barmaid. Looking up, I couldn't help but take note of a scraggly looking man trying to enter the place while carrying a door. It was either a door someone had tossed out or one which the man had torn from an old building. When the barmaid saw him, she yelled, "Don't bring that goddamned door in here."

This is the kind of humor I have witnessed many times while growing up in Appalachia. Short. Sharp. Irreverent. Deadpan. Delivered with nuances, inflections, and nonverbal expressions impossible to convert to mere printed words. Not long, drawn-out tales or allegories. Not parables or epiphanies. Simple and spare, spur-of-the-moment comments. Some, however, live on through the years as oral tradition.

For example, during World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt appealed to all to give or sell scrap iron and aluminum for the war effort. While playing in the barn near my childhood home in Crown City, Ohio, I pointed out to my young Republican playmate two nice scrap aluminum coffee pots. Freddie replied, alluding to the president in a snotty way, "Rosie ain't going to get *that.*" Settled point. We repeated that phrase for years in my family — every time we saw a piece of scrap.

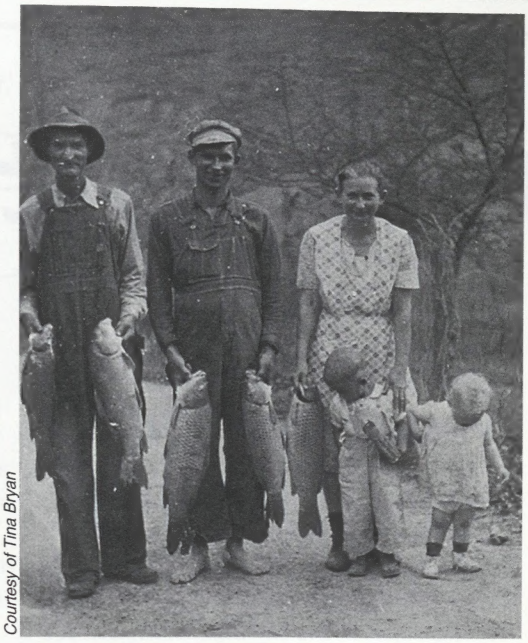
Landowners in their role as bosses often deviled day laborers and drifters. They dished out a kind of mental torment to people who were seen as harmless, as unable to stand up against authority figures. One of my uncles greeted a hired hand whose wife had given birth a few days earlier to her ninth child with "James, you are going to fuck yourself to

death." This expression came from a deacon in the church who said he would not take a drink even if his life were threatened. James did have sense enough to look sideways.

No one was exempt from the deprecation of others and self. If a teacher picked up a nickname like Squirt, it would live on in perpetuity. The person's only defense was to adapt and make the nickname his or her own. Wideass, One Arm, along with a variety of Slims, Big Mouths, No Necks, Big Foots, and Corn Breads lived among the hills and hollows. Milder nicknames often appeared in obituaries.

We laughed about the school teacher whose high heels slipped on the terrazzo, throwing her on her butt and tossing an overhead projector into the air. A lady, taking her first car ride, jumped out of an open-top car into the brush as she and the driver topped a hill. Aunt Bessie McKinley always told that particular story with much laughter.

Aunt Bessie and her husband were marvelous truck farmers. A good truck farmer goes to market early while the buyers still have money. Another trader, going with my uncle to market one summer morning, drove into the driveway at 1:30 a.m. My uncle greeted him, "Come on in and have some breakfast. I've already had mine."



Courtesy of Tina Bryan

When times were bad in the Ohio River Valley in the 1940s, you got by on carp (which was about as fit to eat as 'coon or groundhog), selling some moonshine, and your sharp sense of humor.

Most people treasured the virtues of truth and honesty. Knowing you would see these same people all your life made for good social discipline. However, there were elements of acceptable goofiness and rascality. One of my aunts, packing tomatoes in peck baskets for market, would slip little toads and harmless spiders into the sealed containers. An uncle, making a deal for a new Chevrolet, took his trade-in to the dealer with a dead skunk in the trunk. A friend, perturbed at losing some coins in a newspaper vending machine, came back on other days and slipped a neat copy of an outdated paper on the top of the stack.

Most people would not lie about a horse's age or defects. But if you could skin somebody by buying cheap and selling high, it was something to laugh and regale about. If you could trade the Raleigh man an overripe watermelon for a jar of salve, it was not thought of as something you needed to testify about at church.

The homeless man at the Blue Moon did not cause a fuss or insist further on bringing his door in with him. He just leaned it up against the outside of the building where he could keep an eye on it, had a couple beers, and moved on down Main Street. N&T

Danny Fulks recently read from his book, Tales Along the Appalachian Plateau, *at the Jesse Stuart writers' conference sponsored by Ashland Community College in Ashland, Ky. He is writing the story of caver Floyd Collins at Mammoth Cave in 1925 for* Timeline. *Fulks will be a featured speaker at the Goldenrod Writer's conference in Morgantown, W.Va., in the fall of 1997.*

Teague's Statuary

Stop by and see the concrete
jockeys, black-faced and thin-lipped.
Pick up a small Madonna for the garden,

her hands stretched heavenward like cement lilies.
Maybe you'd like to acquire art,
Venus de Milos made whole,

two arms where there should be none.
You'll see spring in the birdbaths shaped like cows,
hollow plaster pigs pie-eyed as cartoons,

soapstone gargoyles, fangs slightly
reminiscent of old girlfriends, or
sculpted Caucasian angels,

wings unfolded,
forever ready to take flight,
their fate bound up with ours,

earthbound, grounded, limited,
feet firmly planted
in, well, stone.

— Linda Lee Harper

Linda Lee Harper received her master's of fine arts from the University of Pittsburgh, where she won an Academy of American Poets first prize. She has served as editor for The Pennsylvania Review *and of* The Devil's Millhopper *poetry journal. Her work has been published in numerous journals. She has two award-winning books of poetry, and a third book is forthcoming. She lives in Knoxville, Tenn., with her husband and two children.*

Colorful Aunt Sally

by
Hazel Hale Bostic

My next-door neighbor Aunt Sally Hankins stood barefoot in the middle of my new den. She placed short, stubby fingers on heavy hips and turned slowly, her careful gaze missing nothing. Finally, she shook her head in a manner that threatened to loosen her twisted bun of gray hair.

"Sarah, I don't like it — it's too dark, and besides, you don't have enough whatnots," she said. "Just give me a minute, and I'll fix that." With these parting words, she fairly skipped to the door.

"How dare she!" I fumed to myself. The nerve of that fat little old lady. Brazenly walk into my new house and tell me flat-out, "I don't like it." And the "whatnot" bit. At least my house doesn't resemble a zoo. I can walk through it without a map to guide me around ceramic ducks and chickens. What did she mean by, "I'll fix that?" If she means what I think she means, Lord help me.

She did.

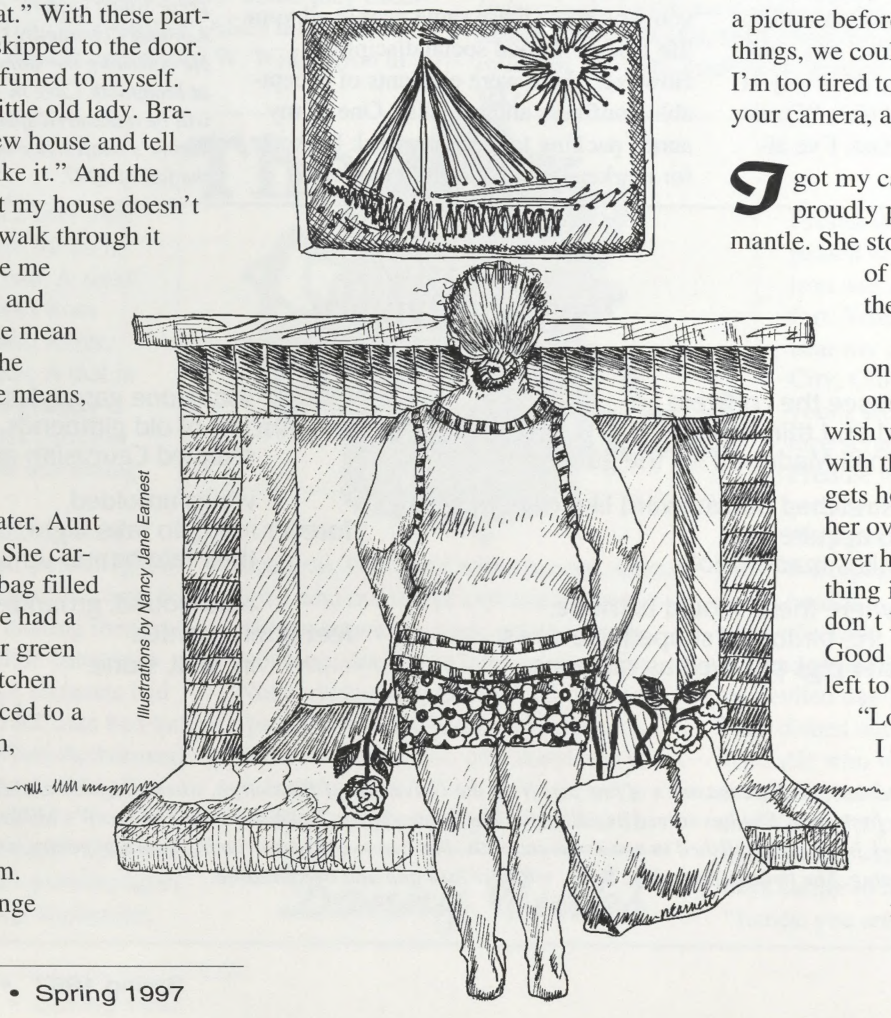
Fifteen minutes later, Aunt Sally was back. She carried a large shopping bag filled with ceramic junk. She had a great time placing four green glazed frogs on my kitchen counter. I was introduced to a family of collies: mom, dad, and three babies. She thought the top of the television an ideal home for them. She hung a bright orange yarn string ship, complete with a black felt background, above my mantle. I felt as if I could faint just any minute as she kept pulling things from her shopping bag.

My husband Dan hates clutter: OK for his garage, but definitely not OK for the house. When she arranged flowers made from colored toilet paper in a red glazed ceramic vase, I held on to one of the bar stools for support.

"We'll put these in the center of your mantle," she proudly announced.

"Fine," I thought. "Maybe the captain of the orange ship will see the red light and turn back."

The flowers proved to be the last "whatnot." Later, while we both were drinking coffee, mine secretly laced with bourbon, Aunt Sally remarked, "You know, Sarah, if we had thought and made a picture before I brought these pretty things, we could make another one now. I'm too tired to take down all of it, but get your camera, and we'll just do it now."



Illustrations by Nancy Jane Earnest

I got my camera and Aunt Sally proudly posed in front of the mantle. She stood between the red vase of toilet paper flowers and the orange string ship.

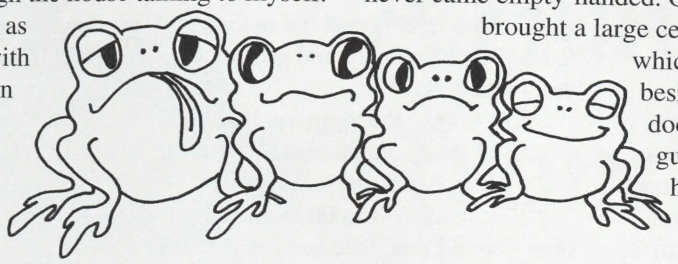
"Well, I guess I'll mosey on home," she said. "I want one of them pictures — just wish we'd had a 'before' to go with the 'after.' When Molly gets home from work, I'll bring her over. Honey, I just can't get over how much prettier everything is. You young people just don't know how to decorate. Good thing there's some of us left to teach you."

"Lord," I groaned. "What have I ever done to deserve this? If she's bringing her daughter over, there's no sense taking it down."

The frogs and collies made no comment as I

went through the house talking to myself.

I wasn't as fortunate with Dan and son Danny. Danny was furious, and, surprisingly, Dan laughed. He came through the garage door into the kitchen and placed his lunch bucket and water jug down. He smiled as he saw the frogs on the counter — and laughed outright when he saw the orange ship above the mantle.



Removing his Island Creek Coal Company cap, he asked, "Aunt Sally been over?"

"Well, these things just didn't fly in on their own," I answered. "What are we going to do?"

"Get used to them," Dan answered without hesitation.

"What?" Danny and I yelled.

"Get used to them," Dan repeated. "That old woman has been a mother to me, and I wouldn't hurt her feelings for all the money in Fort Knox."

"Well, just wait awhile," I remarked. "She'll pull that from her shopping bag next trip."

This took place July, 1976. Dan and I had just moved into our new house. I left the den and kitchen just as Aunt Sally had decorated them. I never explained to anyone. I'm sure people talked about "Sarah's orange ship and red vase filled with toilet paper flowers."

Each time Aunt Sally visited, as she viewed her works of art, her eyes sparkled, and she seemed to stand much taller than her 5-foot-2-inch frame. Usually, she brought a colorful hand-knitted pot holder, an apron edged in lace. She never came empty-handed. Once, she brought a large ceramic bear, which she placed beside the front door. "He's to guard your house and keep it safe," she explained. By this time, I was drinking my coffee straight.

When she died ten years later, I stored all these things in my attic. For weeks, the house seemed so gloomy. I'd grown accustomed to the bright orange ship, now replaced by a mirror. Framed family photos stood in place of the red vase of paper flowers. A VCR invaded the home of the friendly collies. And the little green frogs — I couldn't replace them. Sometimes they're the only ones in the house who listen to me.

Along with Aunt Sally's shopping bag full of treasures, I stored memories of her: memories of how she enjoyed her flower and vegetable gardens, how she laughed, the way she loved to walk barefoot — and how, once she'd gotten all her whatnots just where she wanted them, she was always ready to listen, just like her little green frogs. N&T

A lifelong resident of Swords Creek, Va., Hazel Hale Bostic inherited a love of reading from her mother, Effie Combs Hale, and a sense of humor from her father, Beauchamp. After leaving her job as bookkeeper/office manager for Cury's Inc. in Richlands, Va., she enrolled in a Southwest Virginia Community College writing class taught by Thomas K. McKnight. It was McKnight who encouraged her to try to publish her work. Bostic and her husband, John, have a son, Greg, and two granddaughters.

She stood between the red vase of toilet paper flowers and the orange string ship.

On Blueridge Drive

Knoxville, Tennessee

On Blueridge your mailbox speaks for you.
Kay's purple passionflowers
& her white roses co-mingle,
climbing like hosannas,

blatant, open-throated, praising
her second marriage, praising Michael,
her strong new man.
Here blossoms Kay's coded oratory of joy!

Her honeymoon a purple prose of petals
& perfumed silk, irresistible,
miming love's excesses, nonstop floribunda!
Again & again. Never just one to a stem.

Like Southern belles these bloom in clusters
spilling over themselves, their cascading
ballroom dresses whisper:
touch me, inhale me.

When she draws near in her tidy jeep
the postal lady blushes.

—Marilyn Kallet

Marilyn Kallet is director of the creative writing program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She is the author of five books, including poetry, translation, criticism, and critical essays. Her latest endeavors are Worlds in Our Words: Contemporary American Women Poets, *a multicultural anthology co-edited with Patricia Clark, and* How To Get Heat Without Fire *(reviewed on page 37).*

Jokes Page ... *We asked for them, against our better judgement. Here's a sampling ...*

Here's a joke that came to us by way of the alt.appalachian newsgroup on the internet.

There was a city fella out running one day. Had come to Beverly, Ky., to check on something. He came across a scene in the field that brought him to a stop. It was a cow having a calf, and the calf was coming backwards, tail and rear feet first, and the owner was trying to help. He pulled and twisted and even pushed the calf back in the cow a couple times trying to turn it.

The runner watched for a while, then offered to help. Farmer said, "Fine, come on in. I sure could use some help."

They pulled and twisted and turned and finally got the calf out. They stood back then to admire their work and were cleaning themselves off with an old tote sack. The farmer said, "I surely appreciate your help. If you hadn't stopped to help, I would have lost both the calf and the cow. But you wasted your time and got your clothes all dirty. How much do I owe you for your trouble? And to help clean your clothes?"

The city fella said, "Oh, you don't owe me anything. I'm just glad to help. But maybe you can answer one little question I have. Just how fast was the calf going when it hit the cow?"

Storyteller David Holt writes: "Here is a story told to me by an old fellow who grew up in LaPorte, N.C. The company town is now gone ... just the stories and memories remain."

The Blackwood Lumber Company controlled most folks' lives living near LaPorte, North Carolina, in the 1930s. It was a company town. Instead of being paid in dollars, workers were paid in scrip which could be used like money at the company store. The locals called this scrip "ooh-da-lee-ooh."

One day, an old-timer came up from South Carolina selling peaches door-to-door. A pretty young woman answered the door at one home wearing a thin night gown with nothing underneath. The old fellow was surprised, but asked if she wanted to buy any peaches.

She said, "I'd sure like to have some, they look so good, but I don't have any money. Would you trade for some ooh-da-lee-ooh?"

The old-timer jerked back, stood up straight, thought about it for a minute and said, "It's been a long time, but I believe I'll try it."

This one also came through by way of Jane Woodside's request through alt.appalachian:

A young Eastern Kentucky man decided to seek his fortune in the big city. He had relatives in Seattle and so stayed with them while looking for work. After a week or so, he found a job working in the largest department store on the west coast. It was rumored that anything could be found in this store. Anything!

He showed up 15 minutes early, nervous as a cat shitting razor blades, but was warmly greeted and welcomed by the store manager and so started to feel better about his new job. The store manager explained that it being inventory time, he would not be able to help him very much on his first day but would surely check on him at the end of the shift.

Sure enough, around 5:30, the store manager found him and enquired how his first day had gone and how many sales he had. The day had gone "jus' dandy," and he had one sale was the answer. "One sale," cried the manager. "This department usually has 500 sales per day and grosses over $50,000. How much did you make today?"

"$347,000," the Appy replied.

"$347,000 from one sale? What did you sell?"

"Fishing lures, sir."

"You made $347,000 from selling a fishing lure? Tell me how you did that," the boss said.

"Well sir, this guy didn't know if he wanted the heavy tackle set or the light tackle set so he took one of each. A new light fishing pole, a new heavy fishing pole, some new waders, tackle boxes, and a large cooler topped off the gear list. Then he decided that his old boat wasn't big enough, so I took him over to the boat department and sold him a new 26-foot Bassmaster boat with all the options. His car wouldn't tow the boat, so I took him to our automobile department and sold him a new truck. All together with taxes, the total was just over $347,000."

"My God, son, this was sure a lucky day for you with this guy coming in wanting all those fishing supplies."

"He didn't come in for fishing supplies, sir. He came in for Tampax. I told him it sounded like the week was wasted, and he may as well go fishing."

This one is from Chuck Watkins from The Appalachian Cultural Museum at Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C.:

In our area of the mountains in Western North Carolina, there is a place called Deep Gap which is the home of many very traditional families. And there is also an area called Linville Ridge which is a Florida-style gated resort for extremely new and wealthy residents. So it was unusual for two women, one from Deep Gap and the other from Linville Ridge, to find themselves facing each other, both pregnant, in the waiting room of a local obstetrician.

After a while, the woman from Linville Ridge ventured that this was her third child. The woman from Deep Gap said politely, "Well, ain't that nice?"

"Yes," said the woman from Linville Ridge. "And after the birth of my first child, my husband presented me with a brand new Jaguar automobile."

"Well, ain't that nice?" responded the woman from Deep Gap.

"Wasn't it?" said the woman from Linville Ridge. "And after the birth of my second child, my husband gave me a full-length sable coat."

"Well, ain't that nice?" gasped the woman from Deep Gap.

After a long pause without hearing any information volunteered, the woman from Linville Ridge asked, "Now is this your first baby?"

"Well no," the Deep Gap resident replied. "It's my second."

"Oh, well, what did your husband present you with after your child was born?" asked the Linville Ridge woman slyly.

"Why, he sent me to charm school," came the reply.

"Charm school," the Linville Ridge woman blurted incredulously.

"Ya-as," said the Deep Gap woman. "That's where I learned to say 'well, ain't that nice' instead of 'who gives a shit?'"

A Humorist from Appalachia

by Martin Edwards

A discussion with the Professor about just what Appalachian humor is and why it is so funny.

Zana Naake, McKinney Associates, Inc.

Carl Hurley

To say a particular humor is distinctly Appalachian might seem a bit of an exaggeration. Yes, you've got your Appalachian quilts and your Appalachian folk art, and you can definitely point to Appalachian music as a sublime product of the region.

But can you say that people are funny *in a particular sort of way* in any region, that Appalachia has a humor all its own?

There's a self-described "educated hillbilly," born and raised in Eastern Kentucky, who knows firsthand there is, in fact, such a thing as Appalachian humor. "I know I am an Appalachian humorist because that is where I'm from," Carl Hurley says, quite simply. "But what I tell people is that I'm not so much an Appalachian humorist, you see — I'm a humorist from Appalachia."

Hurley says the mountain people that are his ancestors did indeed sow a breed of humor. "Times were hard," Hurley says, "and I think people learned to cope the best way they knew how, which is to laugh."

Podium Humor

Hurley holds credentials for the job of Appalachian Humorist, if there are such. He was born in a two-room cabin built by his father in Laurel County, Ky. He had a life of one-room schoolhouses, farming, and hard work. "The Great Depression had ended some time back," Hurley says. "But we didn't get word of it. Not for years." Nearly all of the residents of Hurley's hometown of East Bernstadt, Ky., lived close to the land, growing most of their own food. Yes, he says, spending money was a rarity. But as he puts it, the family wasn't poor — they just didn't have any money.

Despite his background, or perhaps because of it, Carl Hurley became Dr. Carl Hurley. He earned a bachelor of science and a master's degree at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) in Richmond. A doctorate in education followed from the University of Missouri in Columbia. Then Hurley worked as a junior and senior high school teacher before a three-year stint as personnel director within the vocational bureau of the Kentucky Department of Education.

Hurley eventually returned to EKU in 1974, this time as a faculty member in the department of industrial education, and taught there until he decided to pursue his calling in humor in 1982.

A fact of faculty life, Hurley recalls, was the occasional speech and presentation required of him at EKU. He developed a reputation among his peers for effective podium humor. He was funny, and he got the message across. Before too long, Hurley says, the invitations to speak rolled in.

From Humorous Professor to Professional Humorist

Changing from college professor to traveling entertainer wasn't what Hurley would call a radical departure. Of course, the money was less regular than his previous salary, but it usually showed up in time. The only costume Hurley has ever worn is what he wore to campus every workday: slacks, maybe a nice turtleneck-and-sportcoat ensemble. He might dress up in bib overalls or some other country costume at times for a gag or a

promotional photo, but he says the only character he plays is himself.

The majority of the engagements during the first years of his comedy career were along those same lines of seminar leader and motivational speaker on topics such as "success is a process," "coping with change," and "developing peak performance." Hurley was still putting across a message with his humor, this time for corporate America. Lately, these gigs have been outnumbered by shows in theaters and such, but Hurley's press kit still includes accolades from corporations like Cotton States Insurance, All Star Dairy Association of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., and the Southern Gas Association.

He might dress up in bib overalls or some other country costume at times for a gag or a promotional photo, but he says the only character he plays is himself.

Hurley's audience varies from these movers and shakers of industry to families, factory workers, pastors, and lots of retired folks. A regular engagement on Hurley's calendar is the Carl Hurley's Cavalcade of Comedy for Motorcoach Travelers. This event, held in Lexington, Ky., reportedly attracts over 3,500 motorcoach travelers each year from 20 states and Canada for a weekend of Hurley's humor plus other comedians, musical acts, and special speakers. All together, they provide what he terms a "weekend of wholesome entertainment."

Hollywood it's not, but Hurley is on the road 12 months of the year, minus a few days to fish. He says he receives somewhere around $5,000 per engagement.

Of Shoats and Port-A-Walls

Hurley doesn't like being called a comic, preferring instead the label "humorist." If you have ever seen a town character telling this week's story to his barbershop compatriots, that is Hurley's delivery. With his tinny Eastern Kentucky accent, Hurley stands before his audience and tells funny stories. All of his stories have something to do with Appalachian life because that is the only life he has had.

But you see, the professor says, that's what makes all comedy work. He calls it "Frame of Reference." Hurley insists that on one level at least, Appalachian humor is related to our frame of reference as Appalachians. It is what we know. And that, Hurley says, is why it is so particularly funny.

Is there such a thing as Appalachian humor? Well, the answer seems to be yes and no. "You could ask the same question: Is there such a thing as Jewish humor? You could point to all the big names on the borscht belt circuit," he says, referring to the entertainers working in the summer resort hotels in New York's Catskills and the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

"There was that span of time when you had Alan King," Hurley says. "You had George Burns, Jack Benny, and all of those comedians who used being Jewish or living under that certain experience as their shtick, and it was very funny."

Hurley says if Jack Benny had grown up in Laurel County, Ky., Benny would still have been a comedian. It's just that his material would be completely different. He'd probably still play the fiddle, though.

Just as the those great comedians of the 1950s and 1960s were appreciated by the nation, not just Jewish New Yorkers, people don't necessarily have to have the Appalachian frame of reference that comes with being from the region in order to "get" a great deal of Appalachian humor. "I have found in my travels that a lot of my stuff is small-town humor," he says.

Hurley gives *The Andy Griffith Show* as an example. People watched the television series' depiction of Mayberry and remembered what it was like to grow up in a small town, Hurley says, even if it wasn't an Appalachian town like Mayberry.

Although Hurley contends nearly all of the people in any given audience usually "get" his jokes, he concedes that there are times when the stretch is too great. Hurley recounts the evening after a show on Long Island when two older women (Manhattanites, actually, Hurley remembers) told the speaker that they really enjoyed his performance.

"But Mr. Hurley," the ladies said, "we have stayed late to ask you ... just what is a shoat?"

Time is another of Hurley's frames of reference. "I'll say, 'I had this fine car way back when, and it had whitewall tires, but three of them were port-a-walls.'" A port-a-wall, he explains, was a white, convex rubber ring that, when installed under the rim of your car tire, was supposed to make ordinary tires look like fancy whitewalls for a fraction of the money.

Carl Hurley's Cavalcade of Comedy for Motorcoach Travelers reportedly attracts over 3,500 motorcoach travelers each year.

"Now, someone a bit younger is going to just stare," Hurley says, "but older folks slap their thighs if only because it had been 30 years since they had thought about port-a-walls."

This is the best kind of funny, Hurley says, when you are laughing in that "ain't-it-the-truth" sort of way. You relate to something — you get the joke. When that happens, it's better than good.

Laughing At Appalachia

For those who don't get the joke, those who live outside of the small-town experience, ridicule might be what Appalachian humor is about. Laughing *at* Appalachia and its people has been pretty popular for decades. Take, for instance, the gap-toothed morons on *Hee Haw*. "Snuffy Smith" is still featured in the comics of newspapers across the country. There is also *The Beverly Hillbillies,* both the vintage TV show and the 1994 movie with Jim ("Hey, Vern!") Varney as Jed Clampett.

"There are times when the Appalachian accent is not held as smart as some-

thing else. I do resent that more than anything," Hurley says. "I mean, this is the language of where we are from. We aren't all overwhelmingly stupid because of it, and we didn't just wake up one morning and say, 'Hey, from now on, let's all talk funny.'"

Inbreeding and moonshining are tired old jokes as well. The hillbilly is unfailingly portrayed as the rube or the dangerous savage. "I do use the moonshiner angle because that is based on truth, and it is something I know," admits the Eastern Kentucky native. "I don't want to continue a negative stereotype, but the fact is, we did it. People would have starved if we hadn't. You could make a living doing it when making a living was a hard thing to do."

Making a living in Appalachia was always the first priority, Hurley says. Perhaps finding a way to laugh lessened the burden, and so humor and storytelling became as much a tradition as hard work. Within that tradition there are people whose nature is to be funny, to make people laugh.

"I was the kind of person who always had people laughing," Hurley says. "My dad was that way, and he got it from his dad. That might have to do with the Appalachian heritage, with the fact that the Scotch-Irish were storytellers. My family were all storytellers."

Carl Hurley hopes his efforts will indeed prove to be universal. He says he would like to try the other part of show business, the one that has brought some down-home humorists into the national spotlight. With some luck, Carl Hurley might be next in line for the post of humor ambassador for Appalachia. N&T

An erstwhile Now & Then *intern, Martin Edwards is a free-lance writer and native of Northeast Tennessee. He lives in Jonesborough, Tenn.*

Bits and Pieces from Carl Hurley's Patter:

Telephone stories:

Eventually, Hurley's family got a telephone installed. "When I was a junior in high school, we had call waiting. We would wait two weeks for someone to call us."

My cousin Eldean had a phone in his car. Well, he took it out. He said he got tired of runnin' to the garage every time that thing rang.

My Uncle Arlo called up to Washington the other day. He was all upset about one thing or another. He said that he wanted to talk to his senator, called the office. The secretary on the phone said, "Sorry, but the senator has gone to the United Kingdom." There was a pause on the line, and Arlo said, "Oh! I'm s-o-o-o sorry. Is it too late to send flowers?"

Kinfolk stories:

Hurley says he goes back as often as he can to visit his kinfolks, to stay in touch with who he is. "They all still live in the same area, all but one uncle, anyway. He had to leave. It was due to his beliefs. He had got to believing that other folks' horses belonged to him."

My cousin Eldean and I are a lot alike, always talking. Of course Eldean is one of those people that has the ability to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. I was up there the other day visiting. Eldean was showing me his new pickup truck. We were going into town to get some cow feed. We were goin' down a straight stretch and he was just pouring it on. I said, "You'd better slow down. You're gonna get a ticket!" I had seen the front of the police car sticking out of the weeds ahead. Sure enough, we were pulled over and the sheriff walked up to Eldean's window. He had those sunglasses on you could see yourself in. He was grinning from ear to ear. He said, "Boy, I've been waitin' on you all mornin'." Eldean said, "Well, I got here as fast as I could!"

Uncle Zack and Aunt Sarah also live in those hills of Eastern Kentucky, as they have all their lives. Uncle Zack, he's something else. He's about 94 years old, and we don't know what we are going to do with him. He still thinks he can do everything he used to. He just got out of the hospital the other day. He had hurt himself. Well, what had happened is he got out there trying to trim a tree! He shouldn't of been doing that. He'd jumped for what he thought was a limb. It was just a crack in his glasses.

My Uncle Arlo's tight, now. He's frugal. When he takes a dollar out of his billfold, it takes old George 30 minutes to get used to the light. Aunt Mavis says he would jump over the gate to save wear and tear on the hinges. He makes her take her glasses off when she's not looking at anything.

And one more law enforcement story:

Back home, the sheriff and his deputies were closing in on a dangerous criminal that was holed up in a building. The sheriff told his men, "Boys, you watch every exit for him. Cover them all. We're going to get him!"

After a while they got in there, looked all over, but the criminal was gone.

Sheriff: "Boys! What happened? I told you to watch every exit!"

Deputy: "We did, sir! I think he got out one of those entrances."

Hillbilly Humor

Jerry Thompson

Thank God for Hillbillies ...

The people of this country have always been blessed with a good sense of humor. I think this trait is probably responsible, as much as anything else, for the country's survival.

Over the years, we have found humor in all sorts of situations. We have laughed at our failures, our successes, our shortcomings, our heritage, our culture, our tragedies, our triumphs, and quite a number of other things. We've been able to laugh at almost anything and everything that came up. We have laughed at ourselves and at others.

When I was a kid, there was a wide variety of jokes about "the little moron." Those jokes fell out of favor when social workers and mental health professionals told us how rude it was to make fun of people who might be a brick or two shy of a full load. Oops ... I didn't mean to put it that way. I guess it was just a sort of subconscious regression to my childhood.

When that humor outlet was taken away from us, we had to turn to other areas. Think how many ethnic jokes you heard before ethnic groups got organized and shamed us into finding others to joke about.

We joked about people with illnesses, diseases, infirmities, handicaps, and a variety of other problems. We joked about tragedies. It seemed for a while that nothing was off-limits.

However, as more and more of the people who were the brunt of our jokes became more enlightened and more sensitive, they made their feelings known. When this happened, our humor became

A hillbilly defends and delights in hillbilly humor.

increasingly confined, and suddenly, we were finding less to laugh about.

As our jokes decreased, it came down to just a few groups who could be the targets of our jokes: fat people, old people, and smokers, for example.

Well, Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers soon managed to make us too sensitive and too ashamed to joke about fat people. The American Association of Retired People did the same for the elderly. And suddenly, smokers' rights groups began springing up in an effort to protect smokers from restrictions and jokes. The smokers' groups, in essence, said smokers have the right to kill themselves with their habit without the additional encumbrance of anyone finding humor in it.

The Political Correctness crowd did more than anyone to stifle the nation's sense of humor. Real estate agents have become very careful not to advertise a property with a beautiful view because it might offend a blind person.

Courtesy of The Tennessean

Jerry Thompson

However, before anyone begins to think we can't have fun any more, take heart. There is still one group we can laugh about — hillbillies.

Hillbilly humor has been around for years and will probably continue to be one of the few groups, if not the only one, which we can continue to make the butt of our jokes. It's not that hillbillies are overly amusing or all that insensitive. They're just not organized. And it's quite unlikely they'll ever get organized.

Hillbilly humor is wonderful, too. It is simple. It is honest. And above all, it is funny.

You'd think that with all these things going for it, there would be some spoilsport climbing the hills and roaming the valley, trying to organize hillbillies. But this hasn't happened — and probably never will.

Having lived in the hills of East Tennessee and been reared on a farm of steep hills and rocks in Middle Tennessee, I've always been a hillbilly. And as a hillbilly,

I know many of us are not burdened with a high degree of intelligence. Therefore, we don't have the additional burden of being required to think with any reason or rationality. As long as we realize this and

Hillbilly humor is wonderful, too. It is simple. It is honest. And above all, it is funny.

accept ourselves for what we are, we will remain a very funny group of people.

I don't know how you would go about organizing hillbillies. Who would have the guts to ask a hillbilly to come to a meeting to keep people from making fun of hillbillies? It would be tantamount to trying to recruit someone to attend a support group for ugly people. First of all, the hillbilly might get the wrong impression and do bodily harm to the would-be organizer.

However, I'm not sure hillbillies want to be organized. I'm not sure they don't find some degree of satisfaction in being important enough to be the brunt of somebody else's joke. I often wonder who is laughing the loudest or the longest when someone makes fun of hillbillies. I'm sure they get a lot of pleasure out of making fun of each other.

I remember I talked to an old fellow a few years ago. He had lived in the hills all his life. Well, he hadn't lived it all at that particular point, but he probably has by now. He could hardly contain his amusement as he told me a story about another hillbilly whose wife had died — twice.

"This old fellow," he began, "noticed his wife wasn't breathing one night. He done everything he could to rouse her up, but he couldn't. He finally called the undertaker, and they brought out a hearse to take her to the funeral home. Now, this old feller lived on the side of a real steep hill, and the undertakers couldn't get the hearse too close to the house. They had to carry the old woman down this hill.

"As they were carrying her down across the front yard — and she was a pretty big woman — one of the undertakers bumped into a small tree, and the old woman fell off the stretcher. Well, when she hit the ground, she started breathing again. And within just a few minutes, she had come around and seemed to be all right.

"Well, she lived several years after that, but she finally died. Or at least her old man thought she was dead again, but after the first time, he wasn't too sure. This time, when the undertakers started down through the front yard with the old woman on the stretcher, the old man called out a

I often wonder who is laughing the loudest or the longest when someone makes fun of hillbillies.

warning: 'Watch out fer that tree.'"

When I think back about all the things we have been able to laugh about in the past — and at how many times we need something to laugh about — I have one recurring thought.

Thank God for hillbillies. N&T

Raised on a farm in Robertson County, Tenn., Jerry Thompson has been a full-time reporter since 1961. He currently writes "Thompson's Station," a column that appears in the Nashville daily paper, The Tennessean. *In 1981, his investigative series on the Ku Klux Klan won a National Headliner Award and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.*

And Now, With Apologies to the Entire State of West Virginia ...

As part of the planning for the humor issue of *Now & Then,* Editor Jane Woodside put out a call on the internet for jokes. Somewhere along the way she came across a flurry of West Virginia jokes posted at the alt.appalachian newsgroup. We decided that although some may find the jokes obnoxious and inappropriate, West Virginia jokes are quintessential examples of the type of hillbilly humor that columnist Jerry Thompson discusses in his article. Here are a few of our favorites. (Trust us, we left out the raunchiest examples. You can look for the completely tasteless jokes yourself at the newsgroup.) We've included a response by someone who also tapped into this source.

Well, here goes. We're sure to hear about this ...

- **Do you know the best decade in a West Virginian's life?**
  It's the fourth grade.
- **If a West Virginia couple get a divorce, are they still brother and sister?**
- **Did you know that the draft age for West Virginians was 35?**
  That was so they could get 'em straight out of high school.
- **Why don't West Virginians eat Jell-O?**
  They can't figure out how to get 2 cups of water into those little packages.
- **Did you know that the toothbrush was invented in West Virginia?**
  If it had been invented anywhere else, they would have called it a teethbrush.
- **How can you tell if you've been bitten by a West Virginian vampire?**
  There is only a one hole bite mark.
- **Why should West Virginians not be given coffee breaks?**
  It takes too long to retrain them.

Jack Meadows, a retired elementary school principal from Elkview, W.Va., (CURLYJACK@aol.com) posted this response to the jokes at alt.appalachian. "I just read that series of 'W.Va. Jokes' and was not amused. I heard most of them told as Ohio jokes by some West Virginians that were as simple as the individuals in these so-called jokes. They weren't funny either time."

What do you think? Express your opinion in a letter to the editor.

— NF

From Medicine Shows to *Hee Haw:* Comedy & Country Music

by Loyal Jones

Country musicians take audiences from laughter to tears — and back again.

The way Roni Stoneman sees it, God himself had a hand in the beginnings of her career as a comedienne.

Veronica (Roni) Stoneman is the youngest daughter of pioneer country musicians Ernest V. "Pop" and Hattie Frost Stoneman, originally of Galax, Va. Although Roni Stoneman is probably best known as the shrill hillbilly housewife, Ida Lee Nagger, on *Hee Haw,* she spent a good part of her youth picking banjo with the various incarnations of her family's musical group, The Stonemans. After she started performing on her own, she remembers that she dropped down on her knees before going on stage one day and prayed, "'Dear God, make me funny. Give me fun and laughter in my soul so I can make people laugh. The people need it so.'

"Right after that, I got up on the stage," the 58-year-old Stoneman recalled in a recent telephone interview, "and before I even got to the microphone, everybody was laughing. I started laughing, too, at the way God works."

Early Days

Roni Stoneman represents the close relationship that has long existed between humor and commercial country music ever since that musical genre's earliest days. In fact, many of the early commercial country musicians from Appalachia began their careers doing stints with the medicine shows that came to even the most remote areas, offering comedy and music to lure people who were as eager for entertainment as they were for medicine to treat their various ailments. Country music vocalist Roy Acuff, for instance, started out performing in blackface and as rube characters in Dr. Hauer's medicine show.

Sometimes just sitting in the audience of a traveling medicine show was enough to influence a future country music performer. For example, Fred Smith, a North Carolina native, performed comedy on Knoxville, Tenn.'s WNOX in the 1930s with fellow Carolinean Red Rector in an act dubbed Red and Fred. Smith has vivid memories of seeing medicine shows as a child in Madison County, N.C.: "They'd sell the Big Chief Tonic … They had good shows, they had music, they done funny stuff. It'd grow every night, and the grand finale would be Saturday, and they'd

Courtesy of Ivan M. Tribe

A member of an early country music family, Roni Stoneman decided people needed to laugh and added comedy to her act.

pack them in. There wasn't no other entertainment back then. Everybody'd come to see it. I learned from them," he concludes.

Entertainers who took their shows on the road during the late 1920s and early 1930s quickly learned that appreciative radio listeners would turn out for personal appearances. These musicians generally performed over stations such as WNOX, Asheville, N.C.'s WWNC and Charlotte, N.C.'s WBT, WSAZ in Huntington, W.Va., and WOPI in Bristol, Tenn., until they had made the most of personal appearances in the listening area. They then moved on to another station and proceeded to develop new audiences.

By the mid-1930s, stations such as Chicago's WLS, Nashville, Tenn.'s WSM, and Atlanta's WSB became more powerful 50,000 watt stations. With their considerably stronger signals, these stations could be heard over wide areas, especially at night. Consequently, entertainers did not need to move from station to station so frequently. What musicians wanted was to get on a popular show on one of the bigger stations, shows such as WLS's National Barn Dance, WSM's Grand Ole Opry, WSB's Barn Dance, WNOX Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round, or Wheeling, W.Va.'s WWVA's Mountaineer Jamboree.

Recycling Vaudeville

Most of those who eventually became comedians were first of all musicians. However, on the longer radio shows, it became clear that good entertainment required more than music, especially since much of that music dealt with such dolesome subjects as murder, lost loves, and broken dreams. John Lair, then program director of Chicago's WLS, began writing humorous scripts, teaming North Carolina's Myrtle Cooper and Scott Wiseman in 1933 for their long run as Lulu Belle and Scotty, the Barn Dance Sweethearts. In 1937, Lair created The Coon Creek Girls, led by Kentucky's strapping, nearly six-foot-tall Lily May Ledford. The Coon Creek Girls sang comic songs and dressed and acted humorously as Kentucky innocents.

On the longer radio shows, it became clear that good entertainment required more than music, especially since much of that music dealt with such dolesome subjects as murder, lost loves, and broken dreams.

Courtesy of Manuel Clark

Fred Smith (r), with Red Rector (l) of Red and Fred, was influenced by the medicine shows he saw as a child.

Lowell Blanchard, a program director in the 1930s and 1940s at Knoxville's WNOX, saw early on that money could be made from country entertainment. Like Lair, he was a clever writer of scripts which included traditional jokes as well as old minstrel and vaudeville routines. Originally from Illinois, he persuaded aspiring musicians such as Archie Campbell from nearby Bull's Gap, Tenn., to perform them. One of the many comedians who did the "old man act," Campbell became a character named "Grandpappy."

When Campbell left Knoxville, first for the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and later for *Hee Haw,* he continued to perform the routines he and Blanchard had written in Knoxville. Blanchard, who incidentally was a great straight man in his own right, produced scripts that were used by a variety of other comedy acts: Red and Fred, Bill Carlisle as Hot Shot Elmer, Homer and Jethro, and Lonzo and Oscar. In addition to comic songs, all of these acts did hillbilly humor that was similar to minstrel or vaudeville routines. The format was usually the "straight man" questioning the comedian. For example, Red Rector played straight man to Fred Smith in the following routine:

Red: Somebody before the show wanted to know if you're from Spivey Mountain.

Fred: Yes, I was born there at an early age. Spivey Mountain is a little town up in North Carolina with a population of about 500.

Red: That is small.

Fred: You know, it never gets any larger, and it never gets any smaller, 'cause every time a new baby is born, somebody leaves town.

Red: You must have come from a large family.

Berea College Special Collections

The Coon Creek Girls (Minnie, who was nicknamed Black-eyed Susie, Lily May, and Rosie Ledford) sang and acted humorously as Kentucky innocents.

Fred: Yeah, there was 19 of us.
Red: Nineteen altogether?
Fred: No, just one at a time.

A Great Release

Road shows especially demanded a balanced and varied program. Jim McReynolds of the bluegrass band Jim and Jesse and the Virginia Boys, notes that "any early bluegrass band would always have a comedian on the program. For example, 'Joe Binglehead' was the comic name of our bass player, Dave Sutherland. We'd do about 15 minutes of comedy in our programs. A lot of times, Dave would have little funnies he'd pop anywhere in the program. If we saw we were losing the audience, we could always pull a joke or two to get things going again."

From the late 1920s on, veteran musician Wade Mainer from Weaverville, N.C., played with Mainer's Mountaineers, the Sons of the Mountaineers, and most recently, with his wife, singer and instrumentalist Julia. He recalls gradually interspersing jokes with his mountain music as he toured the South during the Depression. "I realized that comedy was essential," Mainer says. Whole families, he says, would often walk for miles to come to his shows. "The kids would really go for the comedy. The old people would, too. They wanted something to entertain them and to get their minds off their hardships."

Tennessean Doyle Lawson, leader of the bluegrass band Quicksilver, also touched on comedy's therapeutic value. "Comedy was a way to relieve people of their daily stresses — to take their minds off their problems." Charlie Louvin, a country musician from Alabama who is still a regular on the Grand Ole Opry, concurs. Louvin, who with his brother Ira created a comedy act back in the 1940s called Sal Skinner, says, "Comedy is a great release if you have a job you can't stand but have to keep. It gives you a night away from thinking of that job or your problems or a dim future — whatever the problem might be."

Defusing Anxieties & Fighting Stereotypes

Throughout her long career, Roni Stoneman played music to make a living, but her real love was making people laugh. Back in 1973, *Hee Haw* television series producer Sam Lavullo offered her a new outlet for comedic talent. "The Stoneman girls have been some pretty girls," she says, "but I wasn't the pretty one. I had this space between my teeth. June Carter Cash said, 'I want you to get your teeth crowned, and John and I want to pay for it.' I said, 'No.' I was afraid to get the space filled." She was concerned it might lessen her appeal as a comedienne.

"Sam Lavullo called me and said, 'You're just what we need on *Hee Haw.*' I went all dressed up. I fixed my hair and tried to make myself look so pretty. Bud Wingard, who was a writer on the show, looked at me and said, 'You're exactly what we need because we've got all the pretty girls we need.'

"I said, 'Thanks a lot.'"

> "If we saw we were losing the audience, we could always pull a joke or two to get things going again."

In spite of this less than auspicious beginning, Stoneman went on to do the comedy she loved for nearly 20 years on the show. "I found comedy was a release for me when I got on stage. I was totally free — free!"

Courtesy of Wade Mainer

Wade Mainer gradually incorporated jokes into his mountain music act while he toured the South during the Depression. He now performs with his wife, singer and instrumentalist Julia Mainer.

Courtesy of Ron Thomason

Using witty, sophisticated humor, mandolinist Ron Thomason, founder of the Dry Branch Fire Squad, tries to dispel stereotypes and give audiences the tools they need to understand his music.

Mandolinist Ron Thomason, who founded the popular Ohio bluegrass band Dry Branch Fire Squad, and James "Sparky" Rucker, an African American musician and storyteller from Knoxville, Tenn., are both continuing the tradition of blending Appalachian music and comedy, each in his own way.

Thomason, who is known for his wry sense of humor, has a special reason for interspersing comedy with his music. Says the Honaker, Va., native, "The reason I started the band was that I wanted to do things that I felt very strongly needed to be done. Let's get rid of these Appalachian stereotypes. It's what I'm always trying to work on." He knows that most non-Appalachians have an image of Appalachians as ignorant, violent, and backward. To dispel such stereotypes, he presents witty, sophisticated humor.

He continues, "The culture our music comes out of is not there anymore. For people who are not part of the agrarian society, people who are listening to a music that comes out of a fully agricultural culture and a working ethic, there is a lot of information that they need." And so he is careful to describe to non-Appalachians the region's values, religion, work ethic, and general way of life. "I'm just trying to present that information in a way that is humorous and light and palatable — and yet informative — because what I am trying to do is to give people the tools they need to enjoy our songs. They're highly political, and they are poignant." For example, he might talk about how Appalachian people have been exploited by groups such as coal operators and mill owners before singing a protest song such as "Aragon Mill." Or he may tell how his grandmother during the 1960s War on Poverty went to the county courthouse and inquired if they were taking any prisoners.

> There is less comedy in music today. More sophisticated audiences, while valuing the music, are uneasy with the old rural-oriented humor.

Sparky Rucker speaks frankly about how comedy works for him. As a self-described "big black man," he finds that he has to defuse the anxieties that particular image triggers in some of his audience members. "I find that if I can make the audience laugh, then I've got them," Rucker says. "I've got them for the whole show. Even if it's a solemn occasion, I find that at first, you give them some levity. Then you can give them the sad songs. I like to take them from laughter to tears — and back again."

There is less comedy in music today, partly because more sophisticated audiences, while valuing the music, are uneasy with the old rural-oriented humor. Nevertheless, many entertainers such as Rucker and Thomason continue to inject humor into their shows. The humor serves various needs, but the main one is that all of us enjoy a laugh. It makes us forget our daily problems, fears, and disappointments, and it makes us feel joyful — if only for a little while. N&T

Loyal Jones is the retired director of the Berea College Appalachian Center, though most days, it's hard to tell. Currently, he is working on a book on country music comedy.

Courtesy of Sparky Rucker

Sparky Rucker finds that comedy is the key for engaging his audience. It defuses anxieties and helps him change emotional tracks.

Photo courtesy of Dale Duncan

We "borrowed" Berta Duncan's garden. With lighting, it was ready for filming.

MOVIES, FAME, & FORTUNE

by

JACK R. PYLE

A brilliant movie career begins — and ends — in a moonlit garden.

Can you imagine what it is to have your dream of becoming a star come crashing down around your ankles, all in the span of less than five hours?

Such lightning-charged opportunities do happen. If you can pick up the flaming torch and hold it high, you might one day escape the confines of your garden for the bright lights of Hollywood. You never know which carelessly dropped seed from life's packet will germinate into *your* big opportunity.

Let me tell you about our failure so you can learn from our experience.

The Call

The fated day for my colleague Taylor Reese and me sprang from the fact that we had written two moderately successful books on moon-sign gardening, *Raising with the Moon* and *You and the Man in the Moon.* We weren't looking for stardom; we were merely recording the lore we had learned from our parents and grandparents. We wanted to be sure that the wisdom of a past age — as found in a farmer's almanac — was not lost on the computer generation. This is a generation of youngsters who seem to have little or no interest in preparing for survival should all the supermarkets in the world come down with a blight, then wither and die.

We have no idea how one or both of our books came into the hands of the producers at New Dominion Pictures in Virginia Beach, Va. We only know that somehow it happened.

We had a phone call. Would we be willing to do a segment for an upcoming Discovery Channel program related to the wonders of the moon? Could we do it in our garden in Spruce Pine, N.C.? Could it be on the night of a full moon? The full moon part we presumed was for atmosphere, for capturing the mood as filmmakers the world over do so well.

Sure we would.

Our business is preserving the ancient lore of moon-sign gardening; it is the writing and selling of books. The more we can get our message out, the more our work will not have been in vain.

After several we'll-be-back-with-you calls from the "studio," we settled on July 1, the day after the full moon, as the date. We would be filmed in a "borrowed" garden since our serious gardening days had been temporarily curtailed by book promotion.

"Our crew will be there in the afternoon, and we can do some filming using the full moon that night." I will admit that the quote may not be exact, but that was what we thought we heard. The last call, made on the first of July, informed us that a crew from Virginia Beach and two from Hendersonville, N.C., would arrive around 7:30 in the evening.

We should have felt the shock wave from that little tremor, but when you live back in the woods as we do, away from the rough edges of society, you don't analyze every phrase. We thought we might have to do some filming at the house and then skip over to the garden in the remaining daylight hours. That didn't seem an impossible job, given the length of an early July day.

We had a lot to learn. When you work with Generation X people, you have to learn to think like Generation X, and that is very hard for someone approaching the three-quarter century mark. We failed that test. We had to suffer the consequences.

The Crew

Three vans of people and equipment arrived near the revised appointed hour of 7:30 p.m. with a crew of six. Stacey, the director, was a slim young lady with a chic boy's haircut that had been beauty-parlor highlighted with lighter streaks — a very young grandmother with pizzazz. She was someone we both liked right away, which made the whole ordeal easier.

Dave, the head camera guy, was even younger. He was going prematurely bald and had a nice open face and a ready smile. The second cameraman, Scott the "go-fer," was a young-married, who still

had an occasional pimple. A little on the shy side, he stayed in the van until we were ready for work, but he did loosen up as we went along with the job.

Another Dave was the main lighting honcho. Older than the others, this Dave had a herniated navel punching through his T-shirt and had been contracted for this job because he lived in nearby Hendersonville. His assistant (and also his wife) Garnell was a heavy woman who was strong enough to lift and move all the lighting stuff around — pleasant, outgoing, ready to laugh, nice to be around.

Then there was Sid — also from the Hendersonville area — who was the sound man. He came complete with a cart overloaded with electronic gadgets, with little microphones hanging from his belt, with vast hidden supplies of other sound equipment, and with a giant boom mike encased in what looked like fur.

The setting, the garden we borrowed from our friend Berta Duncan and her son Dale for the occasion, is one of the prettiest sights in Yancey County, N.C. It is in a tiny valley with a stream babbling through it, a tree-lined drive leading down to a log house. Manicured lawns come right down to the stream and to a fantastic old-fashioned garden complete with flowers and berries, as well as the vegetables you might expect.

When you work with Generation X people, you have to think like Generation X. We failed that test. We had to suffer the consequences.

Hey, aren't we all set for a "shoot"?

Winging It

Now up jumps the devil. Remember that one of our books is called *Raising with the Moon.* To these Generation X city slickers, this apparently meant *people who gardened by moonlight* — tilled, planted, tended, and harvested at night, presumably only on moonlit nights so they could see.

Stacey had *seen* our books, but she'd only seen them the night before she came here from Virginia Beach. She had read neither of them. She knew nothing about moon-sign gardening or farmer's almanacs. She was so much a city girl that she had never seen a lightening bug — they were a revelation to her. This sounds impossible, but she's from California (what can I say?), and she says they don't have them there. These truly were the first fireflies she had ever seen, and the glory of them — up close, in her hand — stopped production for a while.

It was while talking with Stacey, in those early minutes of the encounter as we walked down to the garden, that I first heard about the kind of story she thought she was coming to Western Carolina to do. Based on the information she got prior to her assignment, *she honestly believed we were some kind of nighttime gardeners.*

We gave her a quick lesson on almanacs and moon-sign gardening, and we all had to wing it from there.

The movie-style lights (the likes of which neither Taylor nor I had ever seen) were quickly mounted up on the hillsides that form this little Garden of Eden in the glen, glaring down on it to simulate moonlight. The real moon that the crew was waiting for (and which never would have been enough light for filming) did not show until about 10 p.m. — or maybe a little later because it had to top the regular mountains and then get high enough to find our secret, private valley. There were many other lamps, all sizes and shapes, that the crew moved around as needed and scrims and reflectors used to direct light in desired amounts as the filming progressed — and the filming did progress, at the speed of the fabled tortoise.

Photo courtesy of Dale Duncan

Sid the sound man, with his cart of microphones, is watched by Taylor Reese (l) and Jack R. Pyle (r) just before recording a sound track.

Over & Over Again

The first "scene" we were in was with the two of us coming into the garden from a steel gate down near the stream. This gate has been closed, chained, and locked for a long, long time. It was rusted and crusted. So the director explained that we were to begin at the other side of it, climb over the gate, and then come into the garden, walk down the rows, and talk about the plants we were looking at: what needed to be done to them, the moon phase and sign in which they were planted — making up the dialogue as we went along.

And, yes, we were wired for sound — not with the little mikes you see on television that look like

a tie clip, but with body mikes that are taped to your underwear just below your neck, with a wire from the mike extending across your shoulder, under your shirt, and down your back to a battery pack fastened on your belt and out of sight.

So, from our spot over on the other side of the fence, we became movie actors. It's an elixir. Suddenly we were *somebody.* Our careers were taking off.

In the distance, we heard "scene 1, take 1," then the click of those striped, snapping, hinged things we'd only seen in pictures, the guides that identify the segment of film for the editors. Then we heard the director say "action," and we climbed the fence and did the scene. After it was over, there was a conference between the director and the cinematographer (note the speed with which we picked up the jargon), but we couldn't hear the words.

The director said, "That was just super, guys." Before we could bask in the glory of doing it right the very first time, she said, "Let's do it again."

Super? Do it again? But if either of us ever expected to be the next Clint Eastwood *(Go ahead, make my day ...),* we knew better than to start quibbling now. So we went back to our "spots" and waited for the setup to be ready again, with the same clicker and a "scene 1, take 2 — action!"

The monotony of it is hard to capture in words.

We did that particular scene three times, as I remember, and we both found out, after a series of endless retakes, just how boring a job it must be to be a movie actor. There is a lot — a *lot* — of waiting and a *lot* of repeating a scene over and over. All the while, your made-up dialogue, which you thought was pretty good the first time, can't be remembered for the second and third takes. Every word out of your mouth seems to be growing staler with each repetition.

Hi-diddle-dee-dee. NO actor's life for me.

Electric Moonlight

As you can see, this account could go on and on. The monotony of it is hard to capture in words. We did close-ups of pulling up a carrot and shaking off the dirt. We did similar things to potatoes and beets. We pulled up beautiful, pale green lettuce. And, remember, we are in a "borrowed" garden. A camera guy walking backwards down a row is not likely to watch his every footfall. As a gardener yourself, you cringe.

Photo courtesy of Dale Duncan

Taylor Reese pulls up beets while cameraman Dave films a close-up shot.

While answering questions about moon signs and planting, we walked through the rows of vegetables with the electric moonlight shining down on us. And this was an experience, too, because while there was a question asked each time, that question was not on the sound track. So we had to phrase our answers so that it included the gist of the question. The director had explained that only our voices would be heard. For example, the question might be: "What signs would you recommend for planting potatoes?" Your answer might then be: "For planting potatoes, or any other root crop, you would ... "

There were innumerable shots taken of the garden, with and without us in the picture. There was even a series of shots taken of us way up on the rim of the hill — we were in silhouette, of course, with the moon behind us.

We were "on the set" by 8 p.m. We weren't through with the "lights and camera" until at least 12:30 a.m. — all of this for what might end up being one-and-a half to two minutes on the Discovery Channel!

By the time the crew had gotten packed up and gone, by the time we stayed on to thank our host, Berta, for her patience and to apologize for all that had been done to the garden (not to mention her next electric bill — those lights were powerful), we were "on the set" until after 1:15 a.m.

Would we do it again? Well, on that night (or that morning) just after it was over, our answer would have been a fast "no." But time heals all wounds. If someone were to call again next week or next month, I think we'd go with the old show biz chestnut, "The show must go on."

But the movie career, the big time? Well, it's over. If either one of us ever hears the words *scene 16, take 4* again, we'll quickly remember that Hollywood isn't called Tinsel Town for nothing. N&T

Jack R. Pyle has been writing seriously since his retirement as a corporate credit manager in the aluminum window business some 10 years ago. In addition to a murder mystery, The Death of Adam Stone, *and numerous short stories, he has published* Raising with the Moon *and* You and the Man in the Moon *with co-author Taylor Reese.*

ETSU

News CASS

Spring/Summer 1997

Newsletter of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services • East Tennessee State University

Archives & Special Collections
A Division of Sherrod Library

CARROLL REECE MUSEUM

INSIDE:

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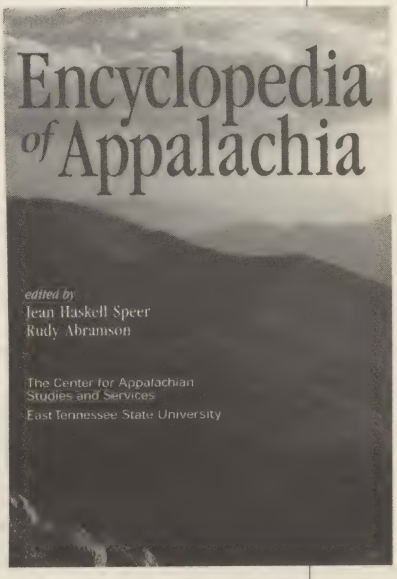
UT PRESS NAMED PUBLISHER OF APPALACHIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA

The Center will join forces with the University of Tennessee Press to produce the ***Encyclopedia of Appalachia***. After meeting with several potential publishers, the co-editors, Center staff, and the Editorial Board of the *Encyclopedia* decided enthusiastically on the offer from the **University of Tennessee Press**.

The Press brings rich resources to the project. They have a highly professional and energetic staff, impressive technological capabilities, and a strong marketing and distribution program, plus a location in the heart of the Appalachian region. Most importantly for this project, the Press shares our commitment to the study and appreciation of Appalachia. As one staff member at the Press commented, "Our continued love and interest in **Appalachian Studies** makes us a perfect candidate for this encyclopedia. We have the support and backing of the university administration, the dean of libraries, and the entire staff of the Press."

Center staff, Advisory Board members, and Editorial Board members of the *Encyclopedia* are excited by our partnership with the University of Tennessee Press and the prospect of what we can accomplish together. ◆



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ELDERHOSTEL STUDIES SCOTTISH TRADITIONS

Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies, in conjunction with the School of Continuing Studies and Buffalo Mountain Camp and Retreat Center, will be sponsoring its next Elderhostel class during the week of April 20-25. This will be the third such program presented, with the first two being extremely successful. In the past, hostelers have come to our area from as far away as California and Florida.

The theme of the Elderhostel week is **Scottish and Appalachian culture**. The basic class structure is divided like Gaul into three parts: Scottish and Appalachian music, Scottish and Appalachian storytelling, and Scottish dance. Each portion will include instruction on the technique of each traditional art form.

The music section is called "From Scotland to Appalachia: The Evolution of Country Music." Students will take a musical journey from the ancient glens of the Campbells of Scotland to the modern-day Glen Campbells of country music. On this musical excursion, students will "travel" from Scotland to Ireland and on to the Southern Appalachian region of the United States where the roots of

Continued on page 2

CENTER BENEFITS EXTENDED

In recognition of the fact that all Center programs are united and that support for any one of them is support for the whole Center, we are now providing membership privileges (three issues of *Now & Then* magazine, *NewsCASS*, discounts on publications, etc.) to those who support any of our programs--the Reece Museum, Archives of Appalachia, Bluegrass, Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies--at the minimum $15 membership level. For example, members of the Friends of the Reece (FORM) recently started receiving *Now & Then*. We hope all our "new" members will enjoy these benefits of membership and hope everyone will continue, and consider increasing, their support for the Center. ◆

NewsCASS, the joint newsletter of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services, Archives and Special Collections, and the Reece Museum, East Tennessee State University, is published three times a year. Center members receive *NewsCASS* as part of the benefits of membership.

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HAIL AND FAREWELL!

Shari Brown, the Center's able and witty grants coordinator, left the Center in January to develop her own firm in regional land use planning. During Shari's time with the Center, she helped develop a significant number of grants, improved the Center's access to information on grants, and administered the Center's travel grants program. Her knowledge of regional planning added to the abilities she brought to her position. Everyone in the Center wishes Shari well with her new venture. We will miss her wry humor and energy. ◆

Elderhostel, continued from page 1

modern country music run deep. Through experiencing the live sounds of the Celtic harp, the Appalachian dulcimer, the Autoharp, banjo, guitar, and ballad singing, students will discover how the sound that has become popular the world over began in Scotland, was reared in Appalachia, and found its adulthood in Nashville. Basic ballad songwriting technique will be discussed and students encouraged to write original ballads. **Stevan Jackson**, the director of Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies and a performer of traditional music will be instructor for this class.

The second portion of the class is entitled "The Storytelling Tradition of the Scotch-Irish and Appalachia." Students will learn about cultural links through history as well as the oral traditions of these two distinctive cultures. Many of the same stories show up thousands of miles and centuries apart. This course will explore how the similarities of their storytelling traditions are played out in both areas by studying examples of stories that are found in both traditional cultures. For many people in these areas, their storytelling and their lives are intertwined. Students will be captivated by the magical weaver of stories and instructor **Dianne Hackworth** from Boone, N. C. Basic storytelling techniques will be offered so the students may learn to weave their own words into magical stories.

"Step we gaily on we go" will be the theme of the Scottish dance portion of the Elderhostel where the students will learn a type of dancing that is easily accessible to most everyone. Students will learn many of the intricate patterns that make this very unique form of dancing popular the world over. Whether you have two left feet or you trip the light fantastic across the Arthur Murray ballroom, Scottish Country Dancing is a cultural experience that tugs at the very soul of anyone with Scottish blood or anyone with an interest in the land of kilt. **Dr. Bernard Kaiman** will be the instructor for the Scottish dancing segment.

Besides these classes emphasizing the culture of Scotland and Appalachia, the students will also participate in a Scottish bagpipe lecture/demonstration, learn about Appalachia while touring Tennessee's oldest town, Jonesborough, and walk the grounds of the Tipton-Haynes Historic Site. As always, the week will close out with a session demonstrating singing, storytelling, and dancing by the students for the students. For more information contact ELDERHOSTEL at (617) 426-8056 or Christina Dowling Soka at (423) 753-6678. ◆

REECE MUSEUM

COLLECTIONS FLAVOR EXHIBIT "TASTE"

Mourning ring from the collection of Margaret Gough

The permanent holdings of most museums are characteristically diverse due to the nature of collecting. A museum that focuses on art and history would understandably have an even greater diversity in its holdings. ETSU's Reece Museum is no exception. A regular visitor to the Reece is likely to be aware of some of the museum's collection diversity by seeing a variety of exhibits identified as "from the permanent collection."

The intent of the exhibit, **"A Taste,"** on display from April 24-May 25 is to work against the Reece's normal exhibit design of selecting objects of a similar media, technique, era, or other "theme." Instead, an effort has been made to select objects from the permanent collection that demonstrate and illustrate our diverse range. Consequently, "A Taste" is an eclectic sampling of the ten thousand plus artifacts, objects, and artworks housed in the permanent collection of Reece Museum.

The historical collections began as a Department of History project in the late 1920s and developed through the years as the museum was housed in the university's library. The art department also had been collecting for a number of years and by 1965 had built a quality core art collection. Both the history and art collections were incorporated into one collection and combined with the B. Carroll Reece collection, at the museum's opening on October 10, 1965.

For the exhibit "A Taste," the Reece is pleased to display items which it has housed since its inception, along with items only recently acquired. Included in the exhibit will be a glass washboard from the **Mrs. I. G. Murray Collection**, a painting by Francine Tint, an insulator from the Tennessee

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BASIC GAELIC COURSE OFFERED FALL SEMESTER

East Tennessee State University will be offering a new language course in the fall of 1997 for all those interested in Scottish and Celtic culture. ***Basic Gaelic I*** will be given under the joint sponsorship of Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies, ETSU Continuing Studies, and Comunn na Gàidhlig (The Gaelic Society) of Scotland. It will be an evening class and will be available for traditional and nontraditional students of our area. *Basic Gaelic I* may be taken for credit, or it may be audited.

Scottish Gaelic is one of the existing languages of Scotland, belonging to the Celtic group of languages that includes Irish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. Of these, only Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic (usually called simply Irish), Welsh, and Breton are all that are still spoken. With roots that go back to central Europe, Gaelic has been spoken in Ireland and Scotland for over 2,000 years, having been brought first to Ireland and then from there to Scotland by settlers known as Gaidheil around the third century. Irish and Scottish Gaelic were the same, with regional differences of dialect, until about 200 years ago when they began to diverge linguistically to become two separate languages.

Scottish Gaelic was spoken by many of the settlers to the New World, with a colony of speakers settling in North Carolina. There was Gaelic being spoken in the Cape Fear region of that state into the 20th century. Reduced at one time to about 80,000 speakers, Gaelic is presently undergoing a renaissance. The number of learners is estimated as high as 23,000 worldwide, with the majority being in the United States. Many of these learners are using self-help texts because there are very few formal ways in which to learn the ancestral Celtic language of Scotland. With the cooperation of our friends in Scotland, it is now possible for East Tennes-

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MUSEUM HOSTS REGIONAL ART SHOW

Over the past 18 years, the **First Tennessee Bank Art Competition and Exhibition** has become recognized as one of the finest art exhibits in the region. From the initial displays at the main office of the bank in Johnson City, to the present-day exhibits at the Reece Museum, the event has grown each year.

A major portion of the show's appeal comes from its diversity; works are accepted in a variety of styles, formats, and media, including paintings, drawings, photography, and sculpture. Last year's competition drew more than 330 entries, which were juried to an exhibit of 70 artworks. The competition is open to all Tennessee residents and to anyone living within a 200-mile radius of Johnson City.

This year, the selected works will be shown at the Reece beginning with the opening reception and awards presentations the evening of **June 5**. The exhibition will continue through Sunday, July 13. In addition to prize money

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ARCHIVES

SELECTED RECENT ACQUISITIONS

APPALACHIAN-SCOTTISH AND IRISH STUDIES COLLECTION
1996. 42 tapes. Addition.
Consists of audiotape recordings of lectures and performances held during the 1996 Appalachian-Scottish and Irish Studies summer course and relates to such topics as Scottish-Irish immigration, ballads, folk music, and Scottish history and culture. Donated by Stevan Jackson, CASS, ETSU.

CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES RECORDS
c. 1990. 21 tapes. Addition.
Consists of 20 audiotapes and one videotape related to bluegrass music, the "Bluegrass Heartland" radio series, and the making of hammered dulcimers. Artists featured in the recordings include Dan Crary, Bill Emerson, Josh Graves, Alison Krauss, Mark O'Connor, Ricky Skaggs, and Ralph Stanley. Donated by Charles Moore, CASS, ETSU.

CHARLES GUNTER, JR. COLLECTION
1996. .5 ft. Addition.
Consists of seven audiocassettes, release forms, and a transcript of oral history interviews with area residents on such topics as Appalachian music, Unicoi Co., Tenn., history, government in Bristol, Tenn., farming, Greeneville, Tenn., history. Donated by Charles Gunter, Jr., Department of Geography, Geology, and Geomatics, ETSU.

JOHN L. KIENER COLLECTION
1993-96. 2 ft. Addition.
Consists of correspondence, teaching materials, pamphlets, and miscellaneous printed matter related to such topics as adult literacy, the Washington County, Tenn., court system, the Tennessee bicentennial, the Johnson City Symphony, and local politics. Donated by John L. Kiener, Johnson City, Tenn.

MAUDE MCGAHA COLLECTION
1865-1930. 1 folder.
Consists of materials related to the military service of John Black, of Cocke Co., Tenn., as a sergeant in the First Tennessee Cavalry, U. S. A. during the Civil War and includes his military discharge, pension certificate, death certificate, correspondence, and other printed matter related to Black's service pension. Donated by Maude McGaha, Richlands, Va.

GLEN ROBERTS COLLECTION
1975-78. 34 tapes. Addition.
Consists of recordings of bluegrass musicians on Roberts' radio program and at music festivals. Performers include the Country Gentlemen, Osborne Brothers, Red Clay Ramblers, Seldom Seen, and Ralph Stanley. Donated by Charles Moore, CASS, ETSU.

CARL WOODWARD PAPERS
1924-68. .1 ft.
Papers of this former ETSU physics professor include photographs, newsclippings, programs, and miscellaneous printed matter related to Woodward's military service, education, and teaching career. Donated by Edith Keys, Johnson City, Tenn.

Archives and Special Collections thanks the following for donations of materials to the department recently: Augusta Heritage Center, Dr. Martha W. Bradley, Dr. Thomas G. Burton, Ron Campbell, Charles Moore, Robert T. Nave, Rebecca Nunley, Carol Ann Pierson, James H. Quillen, Gene Rutledge, and David Whisnant. ◆

Taste, continued from page 3
Valley Authority's first voltage transmission line, a mourning ring from the **Margaret Gough Collection**, a slide rule from the ETSU Department of Mathematics, and the championship football from the 1969 Ohio Valley Conference. The museum intends to offer more exhibits in the vein of "A Taste" as it continues to strive to showcase and increase its fine permanent collection. ◆

CENTER GETS GOOD GRADE IN STATE STUDY

Last year, the Center and all Centers of Excellence in the state, underwent a mandatory five-year review of programs and performance. The Center was required to prepare an extensive five-year report and spend an intensive review session with the evaluation team from the **Tennessee Board of Regents** during a site visit. Everyone on the Center staff, as well as university administrators, faculty, students, Advisory Council members, and community members who work with us, contributed to the effort. It was a successful effort, with the Center re-authorized for funding for another five years. In his letter to the Center, Tennessee Board of Regents **Chancellor Charles E. Smith** noted, "The evaluation report recognized the Center's outstanding accomplishments and the quality of service that it provided. Clearly, the Center has achieved a level of excellence that brings recognition and acclaim to the University, the System, and the state." The Center extends a thank you to our university administration, faculty, and students and to all our members and supporters without whom this good report would not have been possible. ◆

CENTER TRAVEL GRANTS AWARDED

The Center for Appalachian Studies and Services awards travel grants twice each year to supplement travel funding for research about the Appalachian region and the presentation of research findings at professional meetings. Three grants were awarded in the December 1996 funding cycle:

James Axtell, the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va., received funding to defray the costs of traveling to ETSU in early April to deliver a public lecture on the history of Indian-white relations in the 18th century Southeast. He will be featuring the Cherokee Indian tribe and the deerskin trade of the Southern Appalachians. While at the university, Axtell will guest-teach a class in early American history and meet with graduate students and faculty.

Stevan Jackson, director of Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies at ETSU, received funding to travel to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga for the 1997 Southern Regional meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies in February. He presented "Running for the Hills: A Specific Case of Irish Diaspora in the Appalachian Mountains." His paper discussed the Irish Diaspora in general and then focuses on the influx of Irish athletes to ETSU. In particular, the paper takes a look at how these athletes' presence affects culture both in Appalachia and in Ireland as they travel back and forth between America and their homeland.

Kathleen Wilson, director of cultural exhibits at the William King Regional Arts center, Abingdon, Va., received funding to defray the costs of studying the material culture of the textile industry in Scotland and Ireland. The focus of her study will be to understand better how the process of turning flax fibers into linen cloth greatly influences domestic life, the economy, and the inevitable migration of many Scottish and Irish people to America.

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APPALACHIAN-SCOTTISH & IRISH STUDIES

TEA TOTALS UP TO SUCCESS

March 10 felt the gentle winds of spring blowing in on the 1997 Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies **Tì Ard (High Tea)**, which was held at the Jonesborough Visitor's Center in Tennessee's oldest town. Once again, over 100 fellow Appalachian, Scottish, and Irish cultural supporters joined in the fun with a resounding *Fàilte* and a *Howdy* while the meeting hall was decked out in banners and standards and a full-size poster of Mel Gibson as William Wallace from the recent historical blockbuster movie *Braveheart*. There were books to browse concerning Scottish and Irish history and culture and a video running of one of the previous trips by an Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies class as well as beautiful scenic views of Scotland and Ireland.

The participants at the 1997 Tì Ard were treated to some wonderful snacks of the American variety as well as traditional Scottish and Irish faire. There were assorted blends of coffee and tea, of course, but also a good supply of other cuisine as well, such as traditional scones and Scottish shortbread (we were told they were the low-fat variety). The ever popular Scottish haggis (for those who could stomach the makings) was piped in by **Dave Macdonald**, a Scottish clan chief by heritage.

Clan Chief Macdonald provided other piping entertainment. Other entertainment included harp playing and ballad singing. There were two main highlights of the evening from across the waters. **David MacCrossan**, or as he is known by his Gaelic name, Daibhidh MacanChroisàn, came from Glasgow to share his time with us. Daibhidh works as the director of economic development for Comunn Na Gàidhlig, The Gaelic Society. He shared

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Gaelic, continued from page 3

see State University to be at the forefront of the worldwide Gaelic Renaissance.

Basic Gaelic I will be designed to equip the students with basic conversational and personal language survival skills in Scottish Gaelic. The scope of the course is based on the Scottish module currently in use with the Scottish educational system. The class will be taught by a native Gaelic speaker from Scotland provided to ETSU by Comunn na Gàidhlig. The class will run approximately 14 weeks during the fall semester of 1997. This will include a two-or-three-day immersion and orientation at the beginning of the semester to acquaint the students with the Gaelic language, 12 weeks of classroom work one night per week, and a follow-up two-or-three-day immersion session at the end of the class. The core materials for the Gaelic class will be the highly successful *Speaking Our Language* television series and study packs. If this class is successful, we hope future ones in Gaelic will be offered.

For further information on the *Basic Gaelic I* class or other aspects of Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies, contact Stevan Jackson, director, at Box 70556, Johnson City TN 37614 or phone at (423) 439-8465 or by e-mail to jacksons@etsuvax.etsu-tn.edu. ◆

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WORLD WAR I AND WORLD WAR II ITEMS BUILD REECE COLLECTIONS

The staff of Reece Museum has determined that there is a need in the permanent collection for items from both world wars. We have been fortunate to receive a number of items from various donors over the last few months. Most recently, Ms. **Betsy W. Parker** of Kingsport contributed a collection of items from her grandfather **Robert Lee White's** estate. Mr. White died in December 1996, just two months before his 102nd birthday. He was from Southwest Virginia and served in the American Expeditionary Force in France during World War I. His collection includes uniform items, a gas mask, a shaving kit, trunk, and other military gear. Supporting documentation includes a small book on the history of his unit, as well as handwritten notes and a map concerning his experiences in France.

The uniform which belonged to **Col. Kent Herrin**, a Johnson City attorney, was contributed by **Nancy Herrin** late in 1996. Col. Herrin was a 1941 graduate of ETSU and served for 30 years in the U. S. Army Reserve. Additionally, **Rosemary Barson** has generously donated her husband Bill's army uniform. Mr. Barson served in World War II.

Other World War I and World War II items are included in a large collection from Mr. **Howard Bliss**. The Bliss collection consists of uniform items and various insignia from the World War II era, as well as a lighter, pocket knife, and "canvas water bucket" from World War I. ◆

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THANKS TO F.O.R.M. AND OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS

Friends of the Reece Museum (FORM) has worked tirelessly for the past few months on several projects in support of museum programs. Most recently, a group of Friends members put together a major fundraiser, "Mesches and Jazz after Dark," held on April 10. The event was designed to raise funding for the FORM Scholarship Endowment and featured distinctive door prizes and jazz music.

The staff of the Reece Museum wishes to acknowledge and thank the FORM board members who concluded their terms during spring 1996. **Susan Antkiewicz**, **Rosemary Barson**, and **Tim Dills** have collectively volunteered many hours of their time for the betterment of Reece Museum and have actively assisted in many projects of the Friends. Their presence on the FORM Board will be greatly missed. ◆

FORM Board plans special event

NOW & THEN SEEKS SUBMISSIONS

Now & Then is seeking submissions for the winter 1997 issue on Northern Appalachia and the spring 1998 issue on food.

Where does Appalachia (with a short "a" in the third syllable) turn into Appalachia (with a long "a")? The winter 1997 **Northern Appalachia** issue with its focus on the northern part of the region will attempt to answer this and other burning questions. This issue will concentrate on the Appalachian portions of Ohio, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and northern West Virginia. "Over the years, we have said that we cover the entire Appalachian region as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission, but most of our stories head north, then stop dead at about West Virginia," observes *Now & Then* editor Jane Harris Woodside. "We've decided to try to rectify this situation in a major way with this issue." Submissions on a wide variety of topics will be entertained. **The deadline is July 1.**

Then in the spring of 1998, we will produce the issue that managing editor and good cook Nancy Fischman has long been anticipating: **Food in Appalachia.** We want to cover the subject of food thoroughly… from recipes to articles about the role certain foods have played in Appalachian life to a survey of the foods people from various parts of the region miss the most when they move away. **The deadline is November 1.**

Now & Then is published by the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University. Each issue examines a facet of life in Appalachia. Articles and fiction should not exceed 2,500 words; book reviews should be no more than 750 words. If a self-addressed, stamped envelope with sufficient postage is enclosed, work will be returned.

Send submissions and written queries to *Now & Then,* East Tennessee State University, Box 70556, Johnson City TN 37614-0556, call 423-439-5348, or send e-mail to woodsidj@etsu-tn.edu. A sample copy of the magazine is available for $4.50. ◆

Tea, continued from page 5

with the audience the state of the Gaelic language in our modern world as well as a few words and phrases in the ancient Celtic language. He was here also to promote the upcoming class in the fall at ETSU of *Basic Gaelic I* (see related article on page 3).

Also here from across the waters was someone already acquainted with many of the audience members due to several previous visits to our area. **Billy Kennedy**, a writer from Northern Ireland, was back in East Tennessee discussing his country and his new research. Billy has two books under his belt that pertain to this region, *The Scots-Irish in Tennessee* and *The Scots-Irish in the Shenandoah Valley*. He is currently researching information pertaining to his latest literary effort concerning the Scots-Irish in North Carolina.

As a fund-raiser, the 1997 Ti Ard (High Tea) was quite helpful. Contributions were, of course, tax deductible and can still be made to ETSU/ASIS, Box 70556, Johnson City TN 37614. For more information on this or other aspects of Appalachian-Scottish & Irish Studies at ETSU, please contact Stevan Jackson at (423) 439-8465 or by e-mail to jacksons@etsuvax.etsu-tn.edu. ◆

Travel grants, continued from page 5

The next deadline for receipt of travel grant requests is June 15. All current ETSU faculty, professional staff, and undergraduate and graduate students are eligible to compete for grants. Persons outside the university may qualify for two discretionary grants if their research is deemed essential to the work of the Center. The maximum award is $250. Forms are available at the Center office. ◆

Art Show, continued from page 3

provided by First Tennessee Bank, the winner of the First Award is invited to have a solo exhibition held concurrently with the following year's bank show. The work of **Steven Wyandt**, winner of the First Award in 1996, will be exhibited at the Johnson City Area Arts Council's Signature Gallery during the month of June. ◆

ETSU News CASS

Newsletter of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services / East Tennessee State University

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GOOD HOMES SOUGHT FOR *NOW & THEN* ISSUES

Current members, both individuals and institutions, may obtain back issues of *Now & Then* up to and including the fall 1994 "Rituals and Celebrations" issue for just the cost of postage. Complete sets of the magazine through the fall 1994 issue are also available. The Center will provide photocopies of back issues which have sold out.

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Boston Common Minds Its Manners

by Douglas Reichert Powell

A new network sitcom's intriguing new take on "hillbillies" inspires mixed emotions.

About a year ago, I was attending the Appalachian Studies conference at Unicoi State Park in Helen, Ga. At the Friday night banquet, I struck up a conversation with two women who were from Southwest Virginia, as I recall. When they learned I was in graduate school at Northeastern University in Boston, they immediately found a topic to discuss.

"You go back up there and straighten those folks out about who we are," they instructed me. I replied that yes, those Northern urban types did have some strange ideas about the Southern mountains. "Well, have you seen this new show, *Boston Common?"* they asked. I said no, but I had heard of it.

Boston Common is NBC's situation comedy about a Southwest Virginia girl named Wyleen Pritchett, played by Midwesterner Hedy Burress. More specifically, the show is about her brother Boyd, played by the show's creator, stand-up comic and Lynchburg, Va., native Anthony Clark. Boyd has taken a job as a handyman at an exclusive Boston college where his sister is a student. He wants to keep his eye on her as she makes her way in the big city.

My new friends responded with a rolling of the eyes and general noises of disgust that told me all I needed to know. Those networks had done it again, pimping the difficult history of our region, rolling out another slack-jawed-yokel depiction of mountain life, *Hee Haw* goes to Harvard.

Well, now that I've watched *Boston Common* and thought about it a bit, I'm not sure I can fully support these women's reactions — which is not to say that I myself don't have reservations about the series.

Screen Hillbillies

The Appalachian aspects of the show do bear some reflection, if only because the "rural rube" angle is central to the show's success. Without that distinguishing characteristic, *Boston Common* is just a somewhat above average example of the stand-up comic vehicle that has come to dominate the situation comedy formula on the heels of the success of *Roseanne* and *Seinfeld.* But in relation to the range of hillbilly depictions that mass culture has made available over the years, there's cause for guarded optimism in the strategies *Boston Common* deploys.

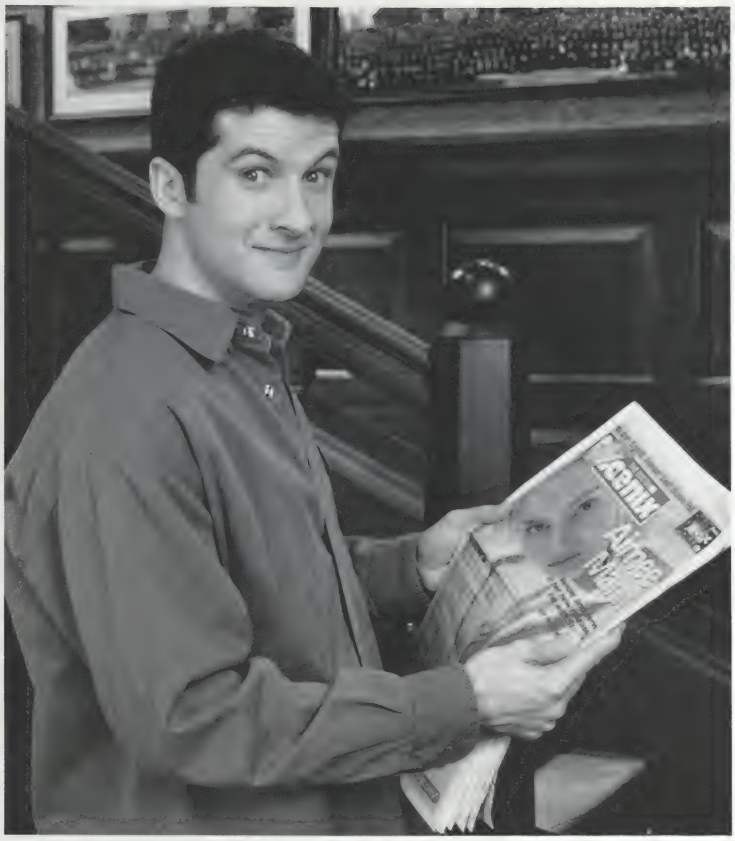
Gary Null

Wyleen Pritchett (Hedy Burress) leaves Southwest Virginia for an exclusive Boston college to get away from her family. However, she is followed to Boston by …

Screen hillbillies of recent times, whether malevolent or benign, all seem descended from the common root of *Deliverance,* John Boorman's 1972 adaptation of James Dickey's landmark novel. Boorman's vision of mountain people as, at best, inscrutable, mutated buffoons and, at worst, a gang of sadistic sexual predators has become part of the collective so-

cial imagination of America. Most anybody knows what you mean when you say "*Deliverance* country" — you're talking Darkest Appalachia.

Hillbillies on the big and small screens generally fall between the extremes of the horrific and the ridiculous. For example, in Martin Scorsese's 1992 *Cape Fear,* the character of Max Cady updates the brutal, bizarre rapist. Robert De Niro gives the role new vigor, emphasizing his origins as a North Georgia hillcountry cracker as he carries out some of the most vicious behavior of recent screen times. Meanwhile, the cult hit *Dancing Outlaw,* the 1991 WNBP public television documentary, profiles Boone County, W.Va., eccentric Jesco White. In the process, the film bears witness to the endurance of the hillbilly as unwitting clown. Jesco's flatfoot dancing provides a point of departure to explore his incredibly random chattering, his history with gas-huffing, his crazed redneck family, and his ability to channel the spirit of Elvis Presley.



Gary Null

... her brother Boyd (Anthony Clark) who gets a job as a handyman working under the supervision of ...

A Fish Out of Water

In this company, Anthony Clark's Boyd Pritchett seems positively urbane, offering little of the freakishness that is the usual attraction of audiences to the hillbilly motif. Boyd is clean-cut, charming, and clever, indeed, even downright wily. Not only does he know a pool cue from a pot passer, a distinction that gave the Clampetts some difficulty on *The Beverly Hillbillies,* he often plays off the misconceptions smug Yankees have about his background to take them down a notch. In one early episode, for instance, handyman Boyd manages to save the entire college, upstaging a staid, upscale, totally unsuccessful fund-raising event hosted by the college president with a tent-revival, evangelical appeal. Boyd's strategic redeployment of old-time religion saves the college while simultaneously putting his stuffy, condescending colleagues to shame.

> Those networks had done it again, pimping the difficult history of our region, rolling out another slack-jawed-yokel depiction of mountain life, *Hee Haw* goes to Harvard.

As a mountaineer cut loose in the very same town as Boyd, I have felt a kind of kinship to him. I've admired his adroit manipulation of his fish-out-of-water status as well as his willingness and ability to unleash snappy comebacks on the more pretentious citizens of the self-proclaimed "Hub of the Universe." The recent addition of British actor David Rees — last seen around Boston as *Cheers'* Robin Colcourt — to the cast as the college's new president Harrison Cross should enhance that conflict, bouncing Boyd's mountain twang off Cross's smooth Anglicisms.

Boyd's relationship to the supporting characters is worth noting as well. Particularly novel is the pairing of Boyd with his acid-tongued African American supervisor, Tasha King, played by Tasha Smith. Though perhaps a little obvious as a gesture to ward off associations of Southerners and racism, their pairing has developed into an odd-couple friendship. This relationship implies some important points about the common cause that should, though by no means does in real life, cross lines of class and race.

Boston Common, however, is admirable for not dissolving the cultural differences between a rural white man and an urban African American woman. It does not suggest that "we're all alike on the inside." Instead, it shows the development of sympathies which honor difference through alliance. Despite their constant verbal sparring, Tasha becomes Boyd's co-conspirator in schemes like his entrepreneurial attempts to sell the "Boydwich," an "old family recipe" for tuna salad. But she also takes part in his larger conspiracy to win the love of the pretty coed Joy, played by Traylor Howard. Seeing these two as a mutual source of information and advice, we get the sense that, in the upper-crust, lily-white environs of a private Northeastern college, these two outsiders make a natural team.

Familiy Ties

Boyd's sister Wyleen likewise represents a revision of certain stereotypes: a literate Appalachian woman with ambition and ability. *Boston Common* gently studies her dealing with her

status in the Northern urban world where her classmates and instructors assume that to be from the mountains is to be poor and, hence, ignorant. Given the premise of the show, with Boyd hanging around to "protect" his little sister, we might expect her to be a bit more of a wallflower or beleaguered waif than she turns out to be. But this is another area where the show self-consciously tinkers with the viewer's expectations. Though her naiveté drives some plots, Wyleen's independence and determination often show up Boyd's paternalism, transforming it into self-parody.

Witness the episode where Wyleen wishes, initially, to join a secret sorority called the Sub-Rosas. Boyd turns his ingenuity and guile to getting her a bid, despite the membership's distaste for her class and origins. In the end, he is successful — only to have Wyleen independently make the ethical decision to refuse membership and ally herself instead with the school's outsiders.

Gary Null

... acid-tongued Tasha King (Tasha Smith), who conspires with Boyd in his efforts to win the love of ...

This sibling rivalry, never truly bitter, suggests a more nuanced version of kinship than the heavily ironic sitcoms of recent times usually allow. For example, when we meet the families of the stars of NBC's Thursday night comedies, the parents are either divorced (as is true in most cases on *Friends*) or suffering from neurosis bordering on insanity (George Constanza's parents on *Seinfeld,* for example). You almost never hear of siblings. Boyd and Wyleen's mutual support despite their surface antagonism speaks to the strength their family bond supplies, and even though appearances sometimes suggest otherwise, their relationship on the whole is one of equals. This relationship defuses the viewers' expectations of sexism and paternalism, just as the Tasha-Boyd connection seems calculated to head off the racist redneck stereotype.

A Mere Bag of Tricks

Indeed, if there's really anything to complain about in this new, improved version of urbanized Appalachians, it's that it seems so calculated to avoid providing any sort of offense. Boyd's savvy self-awareness keeps at bay the pastoral, sentimental version of rural life found on programs such as *The Andy Griffith Show.* This genre suppresses the conflict and controversy that has historically marked the relationship of city and country throughout the nation as well as the internal clashes of race, class, gender, and sexuality that supply the world with the ammunition to label Southerners — and hillbillies especially — close-minded, sexist bigots. Much as we hate to admit it, these stereotypes, like all stereotypes, contain a grain of truth, however small.

Still, Anthony Clark is so clean-cut, so snappy that even his well-honed sense of irony fails to capture any of the roughness that is a part of the survival strategies of so many who live on the geographical margins of American culture. *Roseanne,* for example, gives you a much better picture of people who refuse to conform to middle-class values, to mainstream expectations of appearance and behavior. The obnoxiousness of the Conner family is a matter of principle, a way of asserting their own worth and their consciousness of their social class. Resisting hegemony is often a contact sport, but you wouldn't know that from watching *Boston Common.* Boyd and Wyleen adapt so thoroughly to their new surroundings that you wonder if the message of the show overall is that Appalachian assimilation is not only possible but inevitable and wholly desirable.

Watching *Boston Common* also tells you nothing about the urban conflicts that face most Appalachian people on the move. My own recent move from Boston to the Cincinnati-Dayton area has underscored for me the fact that Appalachian folks, after all, don't typically migrate to exclusive Northeast colleges but to the Rust Belt's industrial centers. There, far from winning their place in the social order through catchy repartee as Boyd does, Appalachians are often ghettoized, then abandoned when their labor is no longer needed.

> Boyd's sister Wyleen represents a revision of certain stereotypes: a literate Appalachian woman with ambition and ability.

The complicated, unwieldy, and often unpleasant story of the relationship between the Appalachian margin and the centers of American culture becomes, in *Boston Common,* a mere bag of tricks as Boyd reels off anecdotes about weird relatives. Those

Gary Null

... pretty coed Joy (Traylor Howard) who is already engaged to insufferable, snobbish ...

anecdotes relate only tangentially to whatever zany misadventure he has stumbled into this week.

At least in the Appalachian freak show of director Jacob Young's *Dancing Outlaw,* we can glimpse, albeit decked out in outrageous trappings, a story of economic hardship and its concomitant social problems as it afflicts a family barely managing to hold on to each other and to its cultural history. I find myself wishing Boyd had a little more of Jesco's wildness. Like *Cape Fear's* Max Cady or like Lonesome Roads, as played by Andy Griffith in Elia Kazan's 1959 *A Face in the Crowd* (the dark side of Mayberry, RFD), Jesco is antisocial, even terrifying. But he does reflect a certain seething that indicts mainstream social order and calls attention to the people and practices it must necessarily suppress or ignore in order to believe in its natural rightness. Boyd, instead, momentarily subverts the social order as a way of achieving his broader goal: fitting in.

Fitting In and Selling Out?

Fitting in is, indeed, Boyd's ultimate ambition. And the show is moving at a remarkable pace toward that goal. The most recent episodes show Boyd moving up in the world, leaving his handyman's job behind to become the ombudsman of the students to the new administration, a massive leapfrog up the social ladder. In a remarkable visual moment, this transformation of Boyd the working class trickster to Boyd the student leader is underscored as he peels off his orange custodial coveralls to reveal a shirt-and-tie beneath.

Boyd's assimilation is expressed, most predictably, in his desire to win the love of pretty, young, white, well-to-do Joy. Joy is engaged to Jack (Vincent Ventresca), an insufferable snob of a professor. Granted, Boyd hopes to displace rather than replace stuck-up Jack, but there's precious little to suggest Boyd would take Joy back home again to Virginia. The traditional resolution of comedy is marriage, just as the traditional ending of tragedy is death, but both endings work towards a similar end: restoring the order of life in the wake of some disruption.

The marriage of Boyd to Joy will doubtless be endlessly deferred by *Boston Common's* powers-that-be and by the demands of the sitcom form, which needs that sustained sexual tension to maintain viewer interest. But that longing for resolution, restoration, assimilation underscores the inability of *Boston Common* to do any really important work in the ongoing politics of Appalachian representation. The show's rethinking of the hillbilly figure robs him (and her — let's not forget Wyleen) of his (and her) seditious power to call repressive conventionality into question, a point underscored by Wyleen's ambition to become part of American media culture. She is, after all, studying acting and communication.

In the end, *Boston Common* bucks the tradition of media mean-spiritedness, only to become just a little too nice. N&T

Douglas Reichert Powell is at work on a doctoral dissertation for Northeastern University in Boston about representations of Appalachian life. He teaches writing and cultural studies and roots for the Red Sox long-distance at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Gary Null

... Professor Jack Reed (Vincent Ventresca). Meanwhile, Wyleen manages to assert her independence anyway, and Boyd begins to move up in the world. Got it?

Trying to Fit In

Elizabeth M. Wright

Breton Littlehales

Elizabeth Wright strikes a dramatic pose just after her freshman year at the University of Virginia in 1975 when she did some modeling — which she hated.

"Tayuksus" born and New York bred, a young woman tries to find her place in Southern Appalachia.

Despite the fact that I was born in San Antonio and have lived over half my life in the South, I could stand on a veranda dressed in a Tara outfit singing Dixie between sips of sweetened iced tea — and still, no one would believe I'm Southern.

I don't know why, exactly. Maybe it was the "wrong" half of my life that I lived in the South: I spent most of my formative years and received all of my elementary and secondary education in New York. Or maybe Southerners have speech patterns, manners, attitudes, and styles that simply cannot be adopted but must be absorbed over generations, from the soil, from the culture, from the schools, and from Southern ancestors. Perhaps it's true, as novelist Reynolds Price has said, that "if your grandfathers were not born in a state of the old Confederacy, you cannot claim to be Southern."

I moved from San Antonio to Long Island at the age of five. The first thing our new neighbors did was tease me about my accent.

"Where'd you move from?" they'd ask, just to hear me say "Tayuksus" one more time.

"What's that big metal thing on top of your house?"

"That's our antayunna."

But I was young and linguistically malleable, and although I never sounded like a native of Brooklyn or the Bronx, within a year of moving to New York, I found that my Southern accent was all but gone.

I loved growing up on Long Island. We had an abundance of harbors in which to sail, ocean and sound in which to fish and swim, beaches on which to sunbathe. We had museums and movies and parks and open spaces, places to swing and play Frisbee and feed ducks and relax. My town of Huntington seemed to me like a generic American town that could have just as easily been located in the bayous of Louisiana or the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia as 30 miles outside New York City.

I believed that until the moment I set foot in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, situated near my college of choice, the University of Virginia.

When I arrived, I stuck out like a sore thumb at U.Va., a university known for its proud Southern heritage and traditions, a university that had recently (and not entirely happily) "gone coed": The student body was about 80 percent men and 20 percent women, 80 percent Virginian and 90 percent Southern. My clothes were wrong, my accent was wrong, my attitude was wrong, and I had trouble understanding some of the accents, especially those from deep in Appalachia and the Eastern Shore region of Virginia. During my first week there, I launched into a hostile anti-hunting lecture to one stunned young man who had asked if I'd like to "go get us some bay-ers."

But my discomfiture on campus paled in comparison to what I felt in the small antique shops, general stores, fruit stands, and service stations of Appalachia. I felt like E.F. Hutton as I walked into my first Appalachian antique store to ask for directions: Everybody listened. Men and

women alike turned to look at me. Was it my hair, long and windblown from the car ride? My cutoff shorts and locks-on-lox T-shirt? My favorite knee socks, thin nylon splashed with colorful Toulouse-Lautrec ladies climbing them? Was it the accent I was trying to mask? I couldn't really put my finger on why I stood out so much. I just knew from the moment I walked in there that all I wanted to do was walk back out.

Yes, indeed, my hometown must have been receiving some *strong* New York/urban/Northern vibes all those years!

But like most college students, I wanted to fit in, and many of my Northern citified attributes could easily be modified, if not entirely eradicated. I stowed the beloved socks, bought jeans without holes, and procured slacks and long skirts with matching tops. I stopped honking at other drivers, and I stopped clearing my throat in irritation in bank and grocery store lines. I smiled a little more and made eye contact.

On the language front, I tried once again to neutralize my accent, this time back toward Southern — with limited success. I was able to slow down and to drop such telltale phrases as "I don't need to hear your whole life story, do I?" and "Baddabing badda-boom" (said while slapping the flat of the palm on the forehead) and "What're ya trying to do — gimme a heart attack?" These modifications, accomplished over the course of a year or two, allowed me to fit in better at the University of Virginia.

But still. Every time I'd go back up into those Blue Ridge Mountains, the people there would put their hands on their hips and squint at me. I felt like a tourist. I tiptoed through their mountains, in slick-soled black ankle boots, slipping, getting slapped in the face by the branches, my hair getting caught on thorns, hopelessly lost without street signs, and constantly on the lookout for snakes, bears, cougars, and men with banjos. Walking through fields of cows filled me with terror. I would have rather walked through Central Park by myself at midnight than alone on a sunny day in the Blue Ridge Mountains. And without my saying a word, the people who lived there seemed to know that.

They'd put their hands on their hips and squint at me.

I live in Nashville, Tennessee, now — an odd compromise between New York City and Appalachia. It's a city, it's Southern (I'm here to tell you), and there are frequent influxes of rural people and people from the mountains of Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee for various events, shows, and fairs. I can spot them now like they could spot me, something not quite tangible but still recognizable.

I'm older now and more mature and more tired. I'm the mother of two children who say "sir" and "ma'am." I gave up on "talking Southern" when I realized that Southern speech is not just a matter of accent. It's a matter of expression and gesture and lifestyle. It has that on-and-on quality, the "cute as a speckled pup in a wheelbarrow" and "blind as a one-eyed bat in the daytime" and "nervous as a long-tailed cat at a rocking chair convention." And not just that, either: It's a lean-in of the shoulder; an intense, confidential murmur of "Honey, I liked to fall out on the floor"; or a head-thrown-back, joyous declaration, "This pie's so good, I think I've died and gone to heaven!"

Let's face it. These expressions will never flow off my tongue like, well, like water off a greased duck's back. I cannot talk that way, and without being able to assimilate into the language of the South, I will never fit in as a Southerner. But just as Southerners can appreciate the differences in people from other regions of the country, I can appreciate the South, its culture, language, literature, traditions, and society without trying to become something that I'm not. And so, at long last, I have stopped trying to "become a Southerner," *to fit in,* and it feels much better this way.

At the most recent Tennessee State Fair, I watched a man from the Appalachian Mountains of Northeast Georgia making lanterns out of tin. He hammered the tin smooth and punctured it with a nail to make intricate designs for the light to shine through. After a while, he paused in his work and looked at me. He put his hands on his hips, and his eyes narrowed. "Ma'am," he said, "you look happier'n a dead pig in the sunshine!"

That's a good sign. Isn't it? N&T

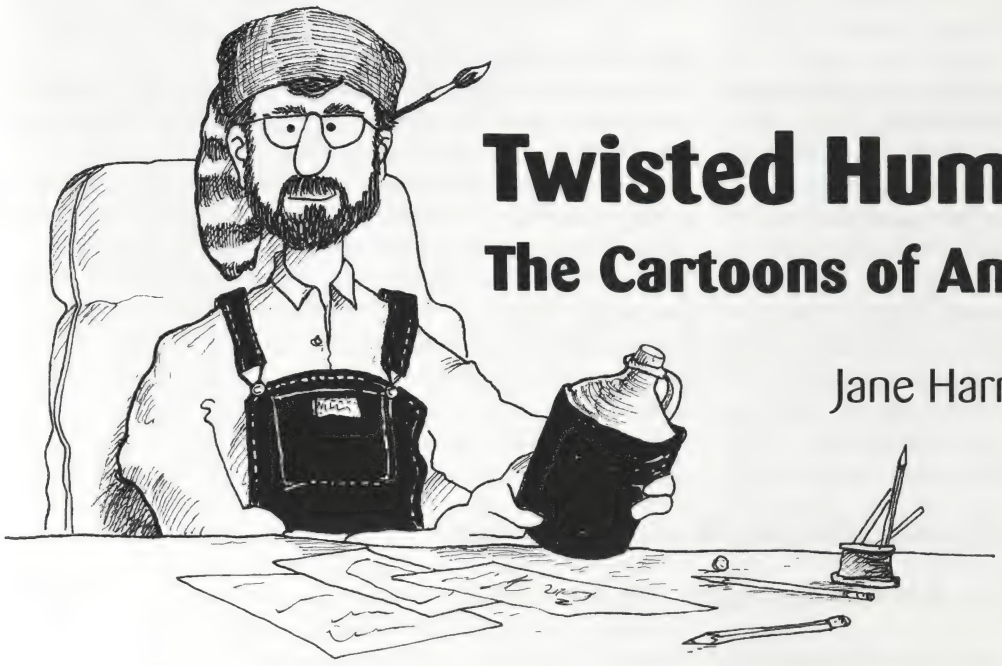
Elizabeth M. Wright has a bachelor's degree in American Studies and a master's of fine arts in writing, both from the University of Virginia. Her first book, The New Mother's Survival Guide, *is due out this summer.*

The Talk in Floyd County
for Ricky

Somebody studied that the tension
in a configuration of stars
struck a cosmic force
between Fred's Barber Shop
and the Floyd County Courthouse,
and soon a New Age store sprung up
across from the City Cafe.
Next, California accents are heard
up and down the Little River,
the price of land is so inflated
that locals can't buy, and what's
worse, they wave funny.
Their kids sit square-legged
in the school yard staring at crystals,
and what the hell kind of card game
is tarot. You don't win nothing,
and what's the advantage of knowing
the future if you can't change it.
The waitress says they don't eat ham and eggs,
and Old Man Cox quips you can't trust
people who smile that much.
They're fair at gardening and carpentry,
my mother's measure of acceptance,
and besides, she says, if the star-gazers
hadn't come, what would you boys
down at the feed store chew on
except the same tired lies.

— Bill Brown

Bill Brown teaches literature and creative writing in Nashville. Three collections of his poems have been published, and he is co-author with Malcolm Glass of a new writing textbook, Important Words for Poets and Writers.



Twisted Humor

The Cartoons of Anthony Feathers

Jane Harris Woodside

A regional artist looks at stereotypical situations from the inside out.

The Baptist Church unintentionally launched Anthony Feathers' artistic career.

"We were Baptists, and going to church was a way of life," 35-year-old Feathers recalls. Before a service began, his mother or his grandmother would routinely hand him a piece of paper and instruct the youngster to "shut up and draw." So while the preacher preached, the small boy doodled and drew — mostly hot rod cars, if he remembers rightly.

He also drew cartoons from an early age. Feathers loved *Mad Magazine* and, as he grew older, became a fan of editorial page cartoonists, ranging from Herb Block (whom he once spied in a Johnson City, Tenn., Radio Shack dressed in bright orange shoes and loud plaid pants) to Gary Larsen.

Back in 1987, Feathers worked at the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) as a graduate assistant. Former *Now & Then* editor Pat Arnow discovered Feathers' gift for cartooning and commissioned drawings for the first magazine produced under her stewardship, the Spring, 1987, Appalachian Writing issue. In one of his initial efforts, he portrayed a bespectacled, earnest John-Boy Walton sitting before his portable typewriter, dreaming up the great Romantic Appalachian novel. "Kiss me, you wild mountain boy" is the dialogue that unfortunately seems to be going through the aspiring writer's mind.

An Appalachian Consciousness Gets Raised

A Kingsport, Tenn., native, Feathers definitely brings an insider's perspective to his Appalachian cartoons. His family has lived in Northeast Tennessee since before anyone can remember. Though he believes that the Feathers were originally Scotch-Irish and were probably pillow makers at one time, he can't be entirely sure. "We had a family tree once, but somebody stole it," he explains.

After graduating from high school, Feathers headed down the interstate a short way to Greeneville, Tenn., where he attended Tusculum College on a soccer scholarship ("now *that's* a strange Appalachian sport") and majored in art. Even though he was only some 40 miles from home, going to Tusculum proved to be a way of moving away from Appalachia — without actually leaving the region. "Tusculum is full of students from New Jersey and Florida. There were maybe only four or five of us from Tennessee staying in the dorm, and I started realizing, 'Hey, I talk a little different.' I was real self-conscious about it."

"I'm back to the point where my accent doesn't really bother me. Wherever I go, I'm going to be me, I guess."

And so Feather's Appalachian consciousness was born, a sensibility which finds expression in his *Now & Then* cartoons. But that sensibility didn't progress very far at the time. "I realized we all have our ways," he says, "and then, I didn't think about it all that much." In fact, he says, although his cartoons give the impression that he ponders the implications of his regional identity on a regular basis, he still doesn't actually give

the matter much thought until *Now & Then* comes knocking on his door, asking for an illustration.

Duck Days

After finishing college, Feathers spent a year-and-a-half working in the advertising department of the *Elizabethton (Tenn.) Star,* where he had the chance to do artwork and produce an occasional cartoon. He soon concluded that an undergraduate art degree wasn't likely to result in much in the way of financial security.

He returned to graduate school, emerging two years later with an M.A.T. and teaching certification from ETSU and is now in his 10th year of teaching art at the Greeneville Middle School. His wife Tammie, also a Tusculum graduate, is a guidance counselor at a nearby vocational school. After coming home from his day job, Feathers spends hours each evening working on his own art in his studio: water colors, etchings, and print-making.

Each summer for the last seven years, Feathers and his wife have headed for Nags Head, N.C., as soon as school lets out. There he has a relationship with Morales Art Galleries in Duck, N.C. In addition to doing seascapes in various media, Feathers also produces limited edition prints of another cartoon series called "Duck Days." Says the artist, "I realize that the gallery's clientele are tourists and that they're going to buy cartoons that relate to their vacations. So I'll have golfing ducks and tennis ducks and ducks lounging on floats in the ocean." His own favorite Duck Days strip shows two ducks relaxing in beach chairs by the ocean. One duck peers over at his companion and observes, "Uh oh, here comes that kid again ... And this time it's throwing bread at us."

"Appalachian people aren't supposed to drink cappuccino. We do – but we're not supposed to ... "

Often as not, the gallery's patrons hail from the North. "All I have to do is say 'Hello,' and customers will ask, 'Oh, where are you from?' " Feathers reports. When he first started going to Nags Head, his self-consciousness about his accent sprang back to life. "I even got to the point where I'd try to change my speech, to try not to sound like I was straight from the hills. I don't know if that was good or bad. But now, I'm back to the point where my accent doesn't really bother me. Wherever I go, I'm going to be me, I guess."

Hillbilly Entrepreneurs

There is one subject about which Feathers feels no ambivalence whatsoever: the evils of some of the more highly commercialized manifestations of tourism in the region. "I have to say that Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge just drive me nuts," he confesses, referring to the thicket of tourist attractions and outlet malls that border the Tennessee entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. "I can remember the way it was before — I used to love to go to Gatlinburg when we were little. That was a big treat: to go to Gatlinburg and walk around the streets a little bit. But now, you turn off that interstate and start up the highway, and you can't even see the mountains for all the billboards."

He has vented his dismay about such development in the pages of *Now & Then* from time to time. In the Spring, 1991, Tourism in Appalachia issue, he contributed a sketch of a thoroughly co-opted bear who has been enlisted to sell souvenir baseball caps and T-shirts. ("Looking at him now, I realize he's a Gary Larsen bear, almost," muses Feathers. "I didn't realize how close he was, but I think I probably stole his face from Larsen.")

For the Summer, 1988, issue about the relationship between native Appalachians and people who've moved into the region, Feathers drew a stereotypic mountain man in bib overalls and hobnail boots, sitting next to a sign inviting onlookers to "Have Your Picture Taken with a Genuine Appalachian Man!" The going rate appears to be $2.50, $3.50 if the shot includes a jug and an exhausted, slightly pained-looking hound dog sprawled at his feet. As the hillbilly in question waits for takers, he sits patiently on a stool, perusing a copy of *The Wall Street Journal.*

Where Stereotypes Collide

The Genuine Appalachian Man cartoon illustrates what scholar Robert J. Higgs has called Feathers' penchant for "taking note of ironic detail where stereotypes collide." Higgs, who

Along with his work trying to fight Appalachian stereotypes, Tony Feathers uses his summer vacations at Nags Head, N.C., as subject matter for seascapes and a limited edition series of cartoons called "Duck Days," all for sale at the Morales Art Galleries in Duck, N.C.

included several examples of Feathers' work in *Appalachia Inside Out,* the 1995 anthology he co-edited with Ambrose Manning and Jim Wayne Miller, points out that Feathers' sketches "reveal a sense of irony and depict a tension between cultural attitudes." They also "reflect at once both self-deprecation and a suspicion, if not an outright rejection, of mainstream values."

"When I first read that, I thought, 'Wow. That sounds really complicated for it all to be about me,'" Feathers laughs, pretty much proving Higgs' point about the artist's tendency toward self-deprecation. "But he made me think about me a little bit, and I do agree with what he had to say." The artist himself describes his approach to cartooning in simpler terms: "I take whatever *Now & Then* has for a theme, and I kind of twist it around a little bit. I just try to look at it backwards."

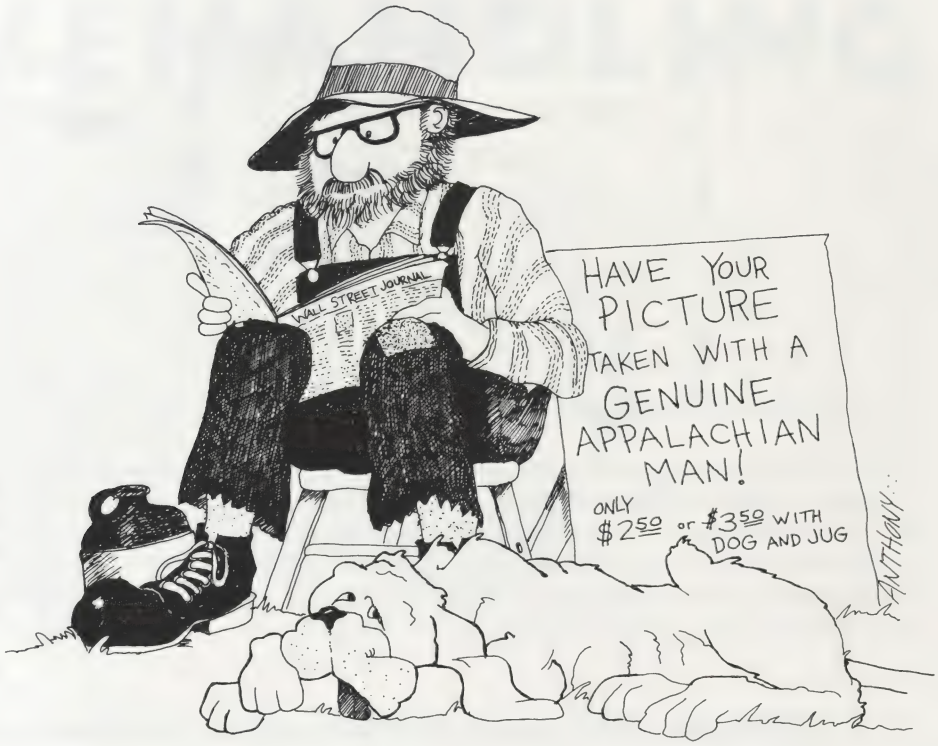
For example, to illustrate a satiric essay by Amy Tipton Gray on regional identity for the magazine's Spring, 1996, Conserving Appalachia issue on historic and cultural conservation, he drew a slightly overweight Appalachian couple. They're longing, it seems, for a really good cappuccino as they sit on the cabin porch they're sharing with an out-of-commission major appliance. "Appalachian people aren't supposed to drink cappuccino," Feathers says. "We do — but we're not supposed to … " That same couple had appeared six years before in the pages of the Spring, 1990, Rural Appalachia issue. Speaking educated Yuppie-speak, they matter-of-factly inform a visiting outsider, standing just off the porch with briefcase in hand, "We'd rather not urbanize. We like the pastoral rusticity of our rural setting." Not only is Feathers violating many people's notions of what typically runs through a hillbilly's mind and is likely to come out of his or her mouth, he is also poking gentle fun at the overblown rhetoric of those who consider themselves better than your average mountaineer.

"Our friends at Nags Head joke about it," says Feathers, "but I believe they're under the impression that we really do have a refrigerator and a washing machine sitting on our front porch. When in point of fact, we haven't had a washing machine on our front porch in several months."

What message does Feathers want his cartoons to send to such people? "Well, I don't want to make it look like we're just some kind of dirt-floor hillbillies. I guess I want to tell them that the people in Appalachia have a little intelligence," says the wry, witty, self-deprecating cartoonist. "We've got some intelligence — and maybe even a little sophistication." N&T

Jane Harris Woodside is assistant director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tenn., and editor of Now & Then.

A Feathers Gallery



This cartoon appeared in the Summer, 1988, Insiders/Outsiders issue (Volume 5, Number 2). In her column, then editor Pat Arnow talked about the distinctions people try to make between genuine Appalachians who are "from here" and newly arrived alien life forms. She finally asked, "Will the real Appalachian stand up?" and then answered her own question by suggesting that everyone who lives in the region should qualify.

Pat Arnow used this cartoon in the Spring, 1990, issue of *Now & Then* on Rural Appalachia (Volume 7, Number 1). Just prior to its publication, the CBS news program *48 Hours* ran a segment about Floyd County, Ky., in which, as Arnow stated, "Dan Rather imparted the surprising information that 'nothing has changed in Appalachia since the War on Poverty 25 years ago.'" In this cartoon, Feathers explains the reason for Appalachia's apparent stagnation to Rather and to the world.

Tony Feathers' strong opinions about what has become of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tenn., is obvious in this cartoon, first published in the Spring, 1991, Tourism in Appalachia issue (Volume 8, Number 1).

"Snakehandling" is an excerpt from a larger work, modestly entitled *Pete & Shirley: The Great Tar Heel Novel.* Described by its editor, David Perkins, as "North Carolina's first and possibly last serial novel," the mystery was the joint and not always harmonious labor of 17 writers from the state, including novelists Clyde Edgerton, Lee Smith, and the Red Clay Ramblers' Bland Simpson. Perkins is the book editor for *The News & Observer* in Raleigh, N.C.

Shirley is a 39-year-old guidance counselor who really wants to be a fiction writer when, and if, she grows up. Her second husband Pete, a 45-year-old shop and vocational studies teacher, is trying mightily to pen the country music hit that will allow him to leave teaching behind. In the opening pages, an excited Shirley bursts in on Pete who is hard at work crafting his latest creative effort, "Bring Your Bad Side to the Bed Side."

She announces that she has discovered a mysterious briefcase buried in a box of clothes purchased at a garage sale. Marked "Personal. Do Not Open Until After My Death and the Deaths of My Children," the briefcase contains, among other things, spiral notebooks, a dried corsage, a .38 revolver resting in mismatched knee socks, sheet music, and 50 Peppermint Patty wrappers. Even more intriguing, it all once belonged to Pete's former high school band director, Mr. Griffin. Griffin's extracurricular activities included playing Dixieland music with Pete and two other students, one of whom was head majorette and vocalist Samantha Lambert. As Pete's cousin Delores informs Shirley, there was a scandal: Samantha "got pregnant and all. I think. Or it seems like she did. And a gun was involved and then it all got hushed up."

Shirley is elated at the fictional possibilities offered by the whole sordid mess. As she makes her way to a CAW (Carolina Area Writers) Conference writing workshop the next day, she chortles to herself, "Fred Chappell, eat your heart out!"

— JHW

SNAKEHANDLING

BY FRED CHAPPELL

But it seemed that something had already eaten Chappell's heart out — or his brains, anyhow. "Planting Plot I," the hour-long session of the Carolina Area Writers convention given over to the direction of the old Tar Heel scribbler, had been designed to teach authors like Shirley Graves-Loggins some of the basics of plot construction. But in Chappell's trembling hands it had become … well, Shirley couldn't describe what it had become. The bleary-eyed instructor poured words — "Aristotle," "syllabic achronicity," "Cthulhu," "Homeric simile," "grandmother" — upon his bemused audience like a man slopping Pulitzer Prize-winning hogs. A gray-haired woman on Shirley's left whispered that she didn't think the speaker was quite sober— and received a response from a woman behind her:

"Well, he never has been."

"Have you seen him before?"

The good-looking blonde replied: "Every day for 35 years. He's my husband."

Shirley sat to the end of this daft performance. Being from Cleveland, she was concerned to show good manners among these Southerners who prided themselves on politeness. Yet she need not have been so meticulous. As she left, she found that the crowd had dwindled to only herself and two unshaven dozing young men. All the listeners, including Mrs. Chappell, had slipped away.

So she moved on to the next session, "Planting Plot II," with barren expectations and was warmly surprised to find the presentation sensible, well-ordered, and helpful. The speaker was a young man with a strong jaw-line and an expression as

intense as a sizzling dynamite fuse. He spoke of characterization, of incident and detail, of setting and background in clear and useful terms. His imagery only added bite to his remarks.

The air was so filled with shrieks, squeaks, squeals, and screams, it sounded like the immolation scene from an Indonesian opera.

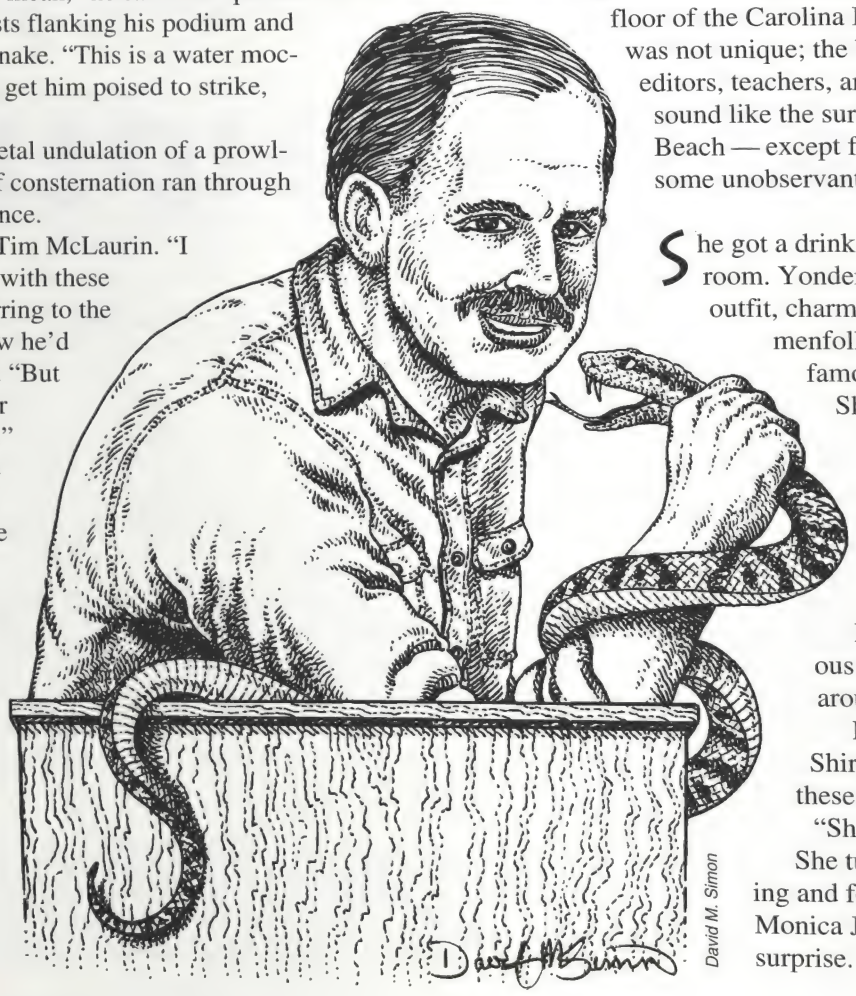
Writers are oviparous, he explained. Like snakes. They produce eggs outside their maternal sac. Then they leave them alone to hatch. He told them that, like snakes shedding their skins, plots had to renew themselves. A good writer never lets an idea escape, he said; he is always lying in wait, ready to strike and secure his prey — that is, his subject.

Shirley's stomach rumbled. Do they get a week to digest it? Shirley wondered.

"I'll show you what I mean," he said. He opened one of the six plastic foam chests flanking his podium and pulled out a large gray snake. "This is a water moccasin," he said. "If I can get him poised to strike, you'll see my point."

Like the smooth skeletal undulation of a prowling python, a murmur of consternation ran through the mostly female audience.

"Don't worry," said Tim McLaurin. "I used to make my living with these creatures." He was referring to the traveling circus sideshow he'd given up to write books. "But I'll always love them for what they've taught me." He laid the snake on the table and poked it with his finger, but the reptile ignored him. "He's tired," the author announced. "I've been carrying him around for shows at nursery schools and mental wards. Let's try something else." But as he turned to restore the moccasin to its chest, his foot tangled with a table leg, and he pitched forward, dropping the one snake and toppling three chests onto the floor. "Oops," he said.



David M. Simon

The lids flew open and out slithered what seemed to Shirley hundreds of snakes. Of course, there were only a few score, but Shirley's black terror had rattled her arithmetical abilities.

The air was so filled with shrieks, squeaks, squeals, and screams, it sounded like the immolation scene from an Indonesian opera. McLaurin tried to calm the crowd.

"They're just copperheads," he called. "Most of them aren't even fully mature."

Another shriek.

He reached for another chest. "Look," he said. "These kingsnakes'll take care of some of the copperheads." He dumped out a clump of long, brightly colored serpents that wriggled quickly away.

Shirley scurried to the exit as fast as her wobbly knees would carry her.

"Wait now," Tim McLaurin was saying. "There's a lesson to be learned here — if you get too many writers involved in one project, they may get out of control."

But the room was empty and silent, except for the chafing of reptilian scales upon burgundy carpet. Shirley's session sheet now indicated lunch, but she knew she couldn't keep anything on her stomach. She wanted, she decided, a Jack Daniel's to calm her nerves and headed for the lounge on the first floor of the Carolina Inn. Her need for a curative was not unique; the bar was crowded with writers, editors, teachers, and poets. The hubbub made a sound like the surf breaking on Wrightsville Beach — except for the occasional shriek of some unobservant soul.

She got a drink and turned to survey the room. Yonder stood Lee Smith in a cowgirl outfit, charming a circle of goggle-eyed menfolk. Jerry Bledsoe chatted with a famous ax-murderess. Behind her, Shirley heard the phrase "Cthulhu Homeric grandmother" droned in a low mumble and turned to see Fred Chappell at the bar, giving the dazed barkeep a full account of his "Planting Plot" speech. He seemed oblivious to the three snakes coiled around his ankles.

He sees them all the time, Shirley thought. He doesn't know these are real.

"Shirley Graves-Loggins!"

She turned to acknowledge the greeting and found her friend, the poet Monica Jeffers, looking at her in happy surprise.

"Monica!" I was just going to hear you at the open mike."
"I won't be there," Monica said. "Since I became a New For-

She turned to survey the room. Yonder stood Lee Smith in a cowgirl outfit, charming a circle of goggle-eyed menfolk.

malist, they won't let me perform."
"Why not?"
"They're jealous. I've gone into country music, and they can't stand the competition. Listen to my new song," she said. "I just wrote it this morning:

"Bring your bad side to my bed side,
Bring your honey side to my bread side,
Bring your hillside to my sled side,
And we'll go down together."

As she heard these words, something clicked in Shirley's mind. Well, it wasn't really a click, but a sound more like that of a dirty sock dropping into a vat of sorghum molasses. Hadn't she heard these phrases before? Hadn't Pete been singing them this morning? How had Monica got hold of the words? N&T

A prize-winning poet and author, Fred Chappell lives and teaches in Greensboro, N.C. His latest novel, Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You, *was published last fall.*

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Flea Market

You come here to haggle, seek a bargain,
find the right tool or trinket: the hunt's
the ticket, a ramble down the rows
to the right table, baskets and cardboard boxes
stacked three deep. You begin to sort
through gears and knobs, rachets and plumb bobs,
clockguts and counterweights, skeleton keys,
pink flamingo yard ornaments and bathroom fixtures,
a tackle box of old lures, Rappala minnow
minus a treble hook, lead sinkers, a porcupine quill
stuck in a cork float, every cast-off item
a clue to a mystery waiting to be
unraveled. You reel from the sheer joy
of it all, reveling in the flotsam and jetsam
of high tide. Here is the world's dictionary,
language of hardware, of the broken and abandoned,
archaic and arcane, an alphabet of abundance,
the weekend's long ode to excess.

—Jeff Daniel Marion

Jeff Daniel Marion is director of the Appalachian Center at Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn., and poet-in-residence. He recently delivered the fifth annual Palmer Lecture at Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky.

Reviews

Sut Lovingood's Nat'ral Born Yarnspinner: Essays on George Washington Harris

edited by James E. Caron and M. Thomas Inge

University of Alabama Press
Tuscaloosa, Ala. - 1996
$62.50 (hardcover)

A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country. This adage applies to the classic fool, especially in the case of the titular hero of George Washington Harris' *Sut Lovingood. Yarns Spun by a "Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool."* There is an excellent case to be made for considering this volume the bedrock work of all Appalachian literature, yet probably no Appalachian work is more neglected.

First published in 1867, *Sut Lovingood* is a collection of broadly humorous sketches full of social and political commentary and narrated in dense dialect by Lovingood, an illiterate mountaineer. Many of Harris' Sut Lovingood stories had been previously published, beginning in 1854, in various newspapers.

Born near Pittsburgh in 1814, Harris was, among other things, a jewelry craftsman, steamboat captain, engineer, and postmaster who spent most of his life in and around Knoxville, Tenn. It is the life of antebellum East Tennessee that Harris portrays — and lampoons — in these stories.

Sut Lovingood's Nat'ral Born Yarnspinner: Essays on George Washington Harris provides a superb aid in reading and understanding Harris. Edited by James E. Caron, professor of English at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, and M. Thomas Inge, Robert Emory Blackwell Professor of Humanities at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va., the book is divided into three sections. "Historical Background" and "The Critical Tradition" contain reprinted pieces which offer biographical information and early reviews of Harris' work by writers such as Mark Twain and literary critic Edmund Wilson. "New Perspectives" contains six new scholarly essays. Taken together, this carefully edited volume explores what critic Milton Rickles calls in his essay, "The Fool as a Point of View," "a variety of qualities of American and Southern life that lie obscurely along the fringes of perception." Contributors also examine comic traditions of the frontier, gender and ethnic issues, political correctness (if not always under that banner), religion, politics, and manners, to name just a few.

While the Lovingood tales have gained the notice of distinguished writers such as Mark Twain and William Faulkner and of critics such as F.O. Matthiessen and Walter Blair, they have never earned their rightful place in the popular imagination. Scholars usually advance two basic reasons for this general neglect: the modern reader's difficulty with the dialect and the coarseness of the yarns themselves, a difficulty which may seem surprising in an age when little seems off-limits.

One of the uniformly excellent essays in this impressive work, "Uneasy Laughter: Sut Lovingood — Between Rip Van Winkle and Andrew Dice Clay" by Franklin and Marshall humanities professor Sanford Pinsker, addresses the problem of Sut's coarseness. In this essay, Pinsker compares Harris and Washington Irving, whose *Legends of Sleepy Hollow* traced the adventures of Rip Van Winkle, with the contemporary shock comic Andrew Dice Clay. In contrast to Clay's more superficial take on the world around him, Irving and Harris, says Pinsker, "knew that humor requires artfulness of a high degree and, moreover, that a genuine subversive humor — one that earns its uneasy laughter — must probe more deeply, more darkly, into the respective societies at which they poked fun."

Yet, as critic Noel Polk maintains in his reprinted 1978 essay "The Blind Bull, Human Nature," the "*Yarns* is among the most ambitious and complex achievements in nineteenth-century American fiction, one that deserves a serious and sustained effort to come to terms with it." In this regard, I am reminded of Faulkner's words, "I write. Let the reader learn to read."

Caron and Inge's collection will perhaps help to elevate Harris to his rightful place as a significant American writer of the last century, the creator of what might well be the most complete fool in American letters.

For a perfect course in Appalachian Studies, I would recommend the *Yarns* (or other selections by Harris) and this collection of essays as a guide to the many complex issues that Harris engages and we still face. Such a course might be sobering at times in an honest exploration of the human condition in Appalachia and America which the material would demand, but it would be fun as well, even if the laughter at

Reproduced with permission, Caron and Inge, Sut Lovingood's Nat'ral Born Yarnspinner, University of Alabama Press.

Only a handful of artists attempted to provide visual portraits of Sut Lovingood. W.J. Hennessey gives his version of Sut with Sicily Burns from the yarn, "Sut Lovingood at Sicily Burns's Wedding."

times is "uneasy."

But that uneasy laughter, we would do well to remember, is earned by the writer's art. In Appalachian Studies, some humor ought to be part of a course requirement, and Sut and his critics stand ready to assist in this important endeavor.

— Robert J. Higgs

Winner of the 1995 Cratis Williams Award from the Appalachian Studies Association, scholar and teacher extraordinaire Robert J. Higgs recently retired from East Tennessee State University's English department.

Roy Blount's Book of Southern Humor
edited by Roy Blount Jr.

W. W. Norton & Co.
New York - 1994
$27.50 (hardcover)

In *Roy Blount's Book of Southern Humor,* Roy Blount Jr. attempts to anthologize Southern humor. It is not an easy task. "Lord knows no anthologist ever had it as hard as I have," he says. "Southern humor is an irregular thing to collect."

What Blount comes up with is a delightfully irregular, eclectic mix that defies categorization. It has become oddly fashionable to speculate about whether the South is losing its essence, to define and redefine what is and is not Southern. One of the pleasures of Blount's venture here is that he does not get bogged down in that distinction.

Blount certainly knows the South, knows humor, and knows his audience. His approach is essentially lighthearted and open-minded; his book is very broad in its definition of what constitutes "Southern."

"Southern humor almost always sounds like people talking on the page," Blount notes. There's no dismissing the importance of dialogue and exchanges of speech in Southern humor. In fact, simply the manner in which Southerners turn a phrase is often funny.

But conversation is not only a key stylistic element of Southern humor, humor is also an equally essential ingredient in Southern conversations. "In the South," Blount observes, "humor (like argumentativeness in New York) is not so much a specialization as a requisite element in discourse."

The writers Blount includes span the varied history of the South, from 18th century Virginia planter William Byrd to North Carolina novelist Clyde Edgerton, from country music star Hank Williams to short story writer Flannery O'Connor. Some are not Southern (gasp!) by anyone's standards (writer and radio host Garrison Keillor, for example) or even writers in the usual sense (Hank Williams and Lyle Lovett, for instance), but they all have some connection to the South. For example, Blount points out that his friend Keillor "has created his own Grand Old Opry" and populated it with guests such as country musicians Willie Nelson and Chet Atkins.

As you would expect, all these people differ considerably in what they find funny. What transcends their differences is their knack for enjoying and expressing the humorous aspects of life. Therein lies the success of the anthology.

It is no surprise that Blount includes writers with Appalachian roots: poet and novelist Fred Chappell, poets Nikki Giovanni and Jonathan Williams, novelist Lee Smith, folklore collector Richard Chase, and humorist George Washington Harris, to name a few.

Because Appalachian people have traditionally been concerned with the curiosities of everyday life and work, it is often in these elements that they find humor. They also tend to attach mystery to these mundane realities, as in Fred Chappell's story, "The Beard." This story is typical of the tall tales often found in mountain storytelling, tales that sing with dry humor like those alleged to have been told by Davy Crockett, also included in Blount's anthology.

Influenced by a long tradition of storytelling and ballads, Appalachian speech is delightfully idiosyncratic and, when done well, is amazingly expressive and a joy to read, as in Jonathan William's poem "Cracker-Barrel Reveries on the Tune Pax Americana."

In one of my favorite selections, "Fighting for Folks," Knoxville, Tenn., native Nikki Giovanni matter-of-factly narrates her family history:

> If I haven't digressed too much already I want to say something about Grandpapa. He was an extremely handsome man. Grandmother got the hots for him and like any shooting star just fell and hit splash. Now we in the family have always considered it unfortunate that Grandfather was married to another woman at the time. And Grandmother, to make matters even more urgent, would not give him none. Grandfather considered that more unfortunate than his marriage.

There is much in the volume that is not particularly Southern, and the Appalachian writers are not necessarily typical of (or even concerned with) the region. Of course, that's not the point. Ultimately, this book is not so much about "Southern" humor as it is about humor itself. The stretches Blount makes as he decides what to include, therefore, are less important than the choices he makes about what is funny.

Blount has done a fine, thorough job with this compilation, and there is something in his tome for every shade of every sense of humor. "Kiss my foot if I haven't gathered a world of wonderful stuff here," he says. And indeed, he has.

— Laura Dover Doran

Laura Dover Doran is an assistant editor at Altamont Press in Asheville, N.C. She is also a free-lance writer and editor.

Harriette Simpson Arnow: Critical Essays on Her Work
edited by Haeja K. Chung

Michigan State University Press
East Lansing, Mich. - 1995
$45.00 (hardcover)

Novelist Harriette Arnow was a little wisp of a woman, standing less than five feet tall. Since the publication of *The Dollmaker* in 1954, however, her reputation has continued to grow until she has become a giant among American novelists. Although she did not enjoy being

tagged as an Appalachian writer, those of us who follow Appalachian literature see her as the major author of her era.

Curiously little has been written about Arnow. Before Chung's compilation, only one book-length study had appeared, Wilton Eckley's thin little critical biography for Twayne in 1974. That book probably did as much harm as good in that he begins his concluding chapter with this judgment: "That Harriette Arnow will go down in the American literary chronicle as a major figure is, at least at this point, highly improbable."

Haeja K. Chung

Harold and Harriette Arnow

Chung reprints Eckley's final chapter in her collection, but her own more substantial critical work goes a long way in correcting this misprision. She also includes much of the best that has been written about Arnow in her collection of 20 essays written by 14 contributors. As uneven as any multiauthored book, still this collection is a major publishing event. It is a timely, generous, thoughtfully compiled recognition of Arnow as a writer who must be given serious attention.

The book is divided into three parts: "Arnow's Life and the Critics"; "Individual Fiction"; and "Authorial Views." Carson-Newman English professor Sandra L. Ballard, currently at work on a critical biography of Arnow, leads the first group with "Arnow's Life and the Critics." This essay is an overview of the essentials of Arnow's biography and describes some of the unpublished manuscripts in the University of Kentucky library. Danny L. Miller, an English faculty member at Northern Kentucky University, follows with an essay on the significant five years the author spent in Cincinnati. This was a period during which she abandoned teaching, began to write in earnest, published several short stories and her first novel, and met and married newspaperman Harold Arnow.

Five critical assessments follow. They provide an interesting diversity of opinion: from Eckley's lukewarm appraisal to Glenda Hobbs' passionate championing of Arnow's work to Linda Wagner-Martin's groundbreaking and persuasive feminist reading of *Hunter's Horn* and *The Dollmaker.* Wagner-Martin's reading links the repressive Christian fundamentalism of the region to patriarchal hegemony. The concluding essay in this section, also by Miller, deals with Arnow's two infrequently examined social histories, *Seedtime on the Cumberland* and *Flowering of the Cumberland.* Miller explains how they illuminate both Arnow's life and her fiction.

Chung begins "Individual Fiction" with an essay on the short stories, fewer than half of which have been published. The contributors' notes reveal that she and Ballard are preparing an edition of these stories. Charlotte Haines contributes the final essay to this section, a study of Arnow's last published novels, *The Weedkiller's Daughter* and *Kentucky Trace.*

The other seven essays, of varying quality, deal with individual works. Of particular interest is Beth Harrison's careful examination and assessment of *Between the Flowers,* an early novel that has not yet been published. One essay on *Mountain Path,* two on *Hunter's Horn,* and three on *The Dollmaker* reflect the relative critical interest in this group, which Arnow thought of as a trilogy.

Arnow calls these three major novels a trilogy in her introduction to the 1963 reprint of *Mountain Path.* That essay is the first of four pieces that constitute the final section of this compendium, "Authorial Views." The other three are a speech Arnow gave in 1968 at a Michigan Historical Society meeting; a 1983 interview with Chung; and Ballard's transcript of a 1985 speech Arnow gave at Morehead State University.

All in all, it is a wonderfully rich collection of essays, interviews, and speeches, adding exponentially to the book-length studies of Arnow. Its very existence makes a statement about Arnow's growing reputation.

Of course, there is room for improvement. Chung writes in her introduction that she has included both new and reprinted essays, having based her decisions on the relative inaccessibility of the essays. What was Chung's criteria in picking those particular speeches and that interview rather than one of several others, all equally valuable and relatively inaccessible? In particular, why was John Flynn's beautiful essay/interview "A Journey with Harriette Simpson Arnow," originally published in the *Michigan Quarterly Review* in 1990, not included? Also, contributors examine all book-length works by Arnow with the exception of *Old Burnside.* I wonder at that exclusion.

At the risk of being called prissy, I would also point out that the categories Chung uses for her divisions are neither complete nor mutually exclusive. To this quibble, I add one more directed at the Press: This otherwise handsome book, which includes excellent photographs of Arnow, is marred by several typographical errors. The most egregious one is the spelling of the author's first name as "Harriettete" throughout the contributors' section.

Far more important than this book's shortcomings, however, are its substantial contributions. Consideration of Arnow as a serious writer has been long in coming. Chung writes in her introduction that she

hopes this volume both contributes to and stimulates scholarship on Arnow. It already has.

— Nancy Carol Joyner

Nancy Carol Joyner teaches at Western Carolina University. Her work on Arnow has appeared in Appalachia Inside Out, The Poetics of Space in Appalachian Fiction, *and* Interviewing Appalachia.

How To Get Heat Without Fire
by Marilyn Kallet
New Messenger Books
Knoxville, Tenn. - 1996
$10.00 (paper)

Air, water, earth, fire — the elemental foods that sustain us. In Marilyn Kallet's new book of poems, *How To Get Heat Without Fire,* these elements frame her joyful labor of loving and letting go: the exchange of sweet breath between mother and daughter; the whitecapped waters of romance; the storied ground of childhood and memory; the fire of survival tempered with knowledge and time — and throughout, Kallet's sheer delight in language.

With her, we "enter/ the house made of storm" where a man and woman are "this wave of flesh this perfect/ going under." In "Forget the Silk," she writes, "I could/ take you to forgetting, lick amnesia across your lashes,/ … we're lost in a silkstorm." When faced with love's end, she wants to "stop the past from hurling forward" and be "a blues engine,/ one honey of a steel-throated sound/ … that won't slow down for you."

Despite love's comings and goings, language enables Kallet to craft experience, to make sense of the parting words and "shape/ a planet in uninhabitable space."

In her desire for a "clean goodbye," she states, "I'm the only one here,/ the only one living this body, this heart." But in the second section, titled "Double Vision," a newness touches this body and heart — a daughter. Suddenly Kallet is a "radiant shell/ swathed in baby clothes and advice."

These poems are good enough to eat: Her daughter Heather's pajamas smell like maple sugar, her skin like vanilla. Together, they are wrapped in "the fumes of love." Kallet writes, "See how the world's beauty has doubled for me/ through you." However, she realizes, "Soon you will push me away,/ drawn to the outskirts of the lake/ navigating your own sleek life." In "Prayer for *Chutzpah,"* she makes her wish for Heather: "Help her grow wild and smart,/ hostage to no one, no one's charm."

Becoming parents joins us to the long history of such connections, to have and to hold, for better or worse. In the pages of *How To Get Heat Without Fire*, Kallet recounts her girlhood, her family, binding these ties with Jewish ritual.

She is a child of the early 1950s, when "duck and cover" slogans plastered school hallways and fear of the Bomb made children's hearts go cold. When the sirens blew in her Long Island town, she wanted to run home: "If it was the end of the world,/ why keep still?"

She is a child of tradition, recalling the ceremonies of her youth. In "Passover," she imagines her loved ones together again — her father who "heads our table,/ his cheeks flushed from the first cup of wine," her Grandma Anna who was "haunted by pogroms," her Aunt Marilyn with breasts as yet "untouched by cancer." At this table, "all the Jews who ever lived are still alive," as if the horrors of the century had not occurred.

Throughout this collection, she holds "these last moments [of childhood] before bed," and "with a blossom of the hand" lets them go.

"We expect our poets to feed us," Kallet writes. Indeed, the power of words can drive us to change and heal what's ailing our bones and our being. "O taste &/ swallow!" she exclaims with enough fire and *chutzpah* to last several lifetimes. "Sounds urgent & strange/ from your own/ mouth/ Ah!"

— Linda Parsons

Linda Parsons' first book of poems, Home Fires, *was recently published by Sow's Ear Press. As* Now & Then's *poetry editor, she finds that the voices of the region make much heat and fire, and she's proud to bring them to these pages.*

Alchemy
by Dana Wildsmith
Sow's Ear Press
Abingdon, Va. - 1995
$6.00 (paper)

What a reader looks for in any book of poetry is that mysterious transmutation of the ordinary into the luminous reality we call art, a kind of magic akin to what the title of Dana Wildsmith's first chapbook *Alchemy* signifies.

In a first collection, this transformation must take place at least a few times as proof, so to speak, that the new poet has the talent to continue making poems worth reading. Despite some beginner's lapses in craft and image, Wildsmith is able to make this poetic alchemy happen often enough that the reader is left with little doubt that she has the talent to become a very good poet, one whose voice can both sing and sear.

The magic in *Alchemy* takes awhile to build, however; the first three poems don't do much to help it along. They seem to be obligatory Appalachian pieces, with little connection to each other or to what follows.

The first poem, "Annie in the Morning," tries to be charming but comes out sounding cute. "New Poor," the second work, takes on the struggle to survive amid diminished means, but that struggle lacks the emotional resonance needed to make it believable. This poem seems peculiarly disjointed, perhaps because of some odd metaphors and awkward lines, perhaps because we never get a clear sense of who the newly impoverished "she" of the poem is. Is she in fact the Annie of the first poem, as the third poem, "Annie Adjusts," suggests? "Annie Adjusts" is a well-modulated poem that spins itself out rather pleasantly but ultimately doesn't lead anywhere.

In fact, the poem that immediately follows, "The Biggest Difference," is the one that strikes out for new territory with its contemporary feminist subject matter and tone. Over the next several poems, the book begins to gather intensity as Wildsmith, a Georgia native, explores the possibilities of her own experience, her own woman's voice, often with candor and sensuality. This exploration culmi-

nates in the horrifying but transformative experience of the poet's being badly burned as a child.

This burning — and the vision it brings — waits at the heart of the collection. As the book progresses, the poems begin to take on an increasingly revelatory tone, something the titles themselves suggest: "When I Tell About Death," "The Hardest Part," "What Dying Taught Me." Most of the time, Wildsmith uses honesty and irony to skirt the danger of self-pity. Here is a poet who can look unflinchingly at pain and find herself rewarded with poems that burn themselves into the reader's mind.

Not that there isn't humor in this chapbook. A poem such as "Force" gives us a new take on the father/daughter relationship, and in "Neighbors," we find such lines as these:

> I don't know
> the names of his children
> and he often calls me
> by a name that's
> one vowel away from correct,
> but we are familiar with
> each other's underwear.
> I clear his clothesline
> for him when it rains,
> and he does the same for me,
> even though he is Hanes
> and I am Victoria's Secret.

The real achievement of this book, however, can be found in the long concluding poem, "How It Happened." Among its virtues is an ability to shift pacing to express a variety of emotional effects. From its low-key beginning on "one of those February nights/ that give us of the deep south an excuse/ to start a fire in the mostly unused/ fireplace," the poem moves inexorably over the next five stanzas toward the beautiful yet horrible image of "flames petalled like gladiolas toward my hands,/ hands trying to do the mind's business/ and the mind like flame consuming itself."

Here the poem shifts gears, and for the next three stanzas, we see the burned girl in slow motion, "mesmerized within that caul" as if in a ritual, until she breaks free into panic and calls to her mother. In the stanzas leading to the conclusion, the poem enters the mythic realm, as the child lies "swaddled," looking at her hands "fresh from the kiln," the house dead quiet as if waiting for transformation — waiting perhaps for the goddess who in the Greek myths would have made the child Demophoön immortal by burning him in the fire.

But this is a poem, and whatever transformation we desire must be wrought through words. As Wildsmith says in the last stanza, "You have only what I tell you. You are in a garden, blind,/ and I have been making small pale flowers/ out of words."

Poetry is as much manipulation as it is revelation, and in her pursuit of that art and its ambiguities, Wildsmith is a passionate and cunning apprentice.

— Kathryn Stripling Byer

Kathryn Stripling Byer lives in Cullowhee, N.C. Her two books of poetry are The Girl in the Midst of the Harvest *and* Wildwood Flower. *Her third,* Black Shawl, *is forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press in 1997.*

HomeWorks: A Book of Tennessee Writers
edited by
Phyllis Tickle and Alice Swanson
University of Tennessee Press
Knoxville - 1996
$17.95 (paper), $35.00 (hardcover)

The high visibility during the past decade of Tennessee authors such as novelists Cormac McCarthy and Sharyn McCrumb and short story master Peter Taylor has helped to draw attention to the fecundity of literary talent in the state. General editor Phyllis Tickle and associate editor Alice Swanson have compiled an admirable cross section of the state's creative forces in the anthology, *HomeWorks.*

HomeWorks maintains the laudable standard set by its 1986 predecessor volume, *HomeWords,* a Tennessee Homecoming tribute anthology. A collection of short works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry from over 100 established and emerging writers, *HomeWorks*' focus is on works by living writers in or from Tennessee. A strong contingent represents the eastern third of the state.

As the jacket copy promises, the current volume does touch on a "marvelous variety" of themes. However, the editors draw too fine a distinction when they assert that the selections are "characterized by the relative *absence* of those qualities usually associated with southern literature," qualities such as dialect, use of the colloquial, a "sense of place," and a preoccupation with "the great war of secession."

Indeed, many of the works show traces of the evolution of a distinct heritage that makes Southern literature so precious to acolytes and imitators alike. Very modern concerns, from crack babies to the legacy of racial intolerance, are balanced by more than a few sentimental ruminations on nightcrawlers, watermelon feasts, pie safes, and the ghosts of country music. For those who relish such juxtapositions in contemporary Southern writing, such a mix ain't too hard to swallow.

The most diverse array of voices appears in the nonfiction selections. Engaging reflections on family and identity are presented from Native American, African American, emigrant, and various other perspectives.

Particularly moving is Oak Ridge, Tenn., native Bob Summer's reminiscence, "Jim, My Father," reprinted from *A Member of the Family: Gay Men Write About Their Families.* The essay describes how father and son arrive at a timeless moment of understanding during Christmas. Its deft and unaffected language avoids the many pitfalls of lesser treatments of such a theme, especially in this era of public histrionics regarding family matters. Equally thoughtful is writer and photographer Stanley Booth's quite serious discussion of the "triple distilled" nature of the Southern redneck in an excerpt from a longer essay entitled "Redneck."

Family and other dysfunctional associations are the focus of several of the pieces of fiction. Novelist and Civil War historiographer Shelby Foote's "A Marriage Portion" is a gimlet-eyed account of one wife's doomed union to an alcoholic bridegroom in the 1920s. The narrator, after the inevitable divorce, bitterly relates how her ex's subsequent wife "gave him a hard time, some Yankee who pro-

nounced her final g's and all the r's. It served him right." Works by promising new storytellers appear alongside excerpts from native East Tennesseans familiar to followers of Appalachian literature — McCrumb, Lisa Alther, and essayist and novelist Richard Marius.

The poetry in *HomeWorks* ranges from the wistful and confessional to the fervent and sensual. Pastoral imagery abounds. The surer hands manage to infuse their commonplace subjects with a reverence that is delightful but not cloying. Jefferson City poet Jeff Daniel Marion celebrates the ignorant bliss of barbecue-bound pigs: "snorkle snout ringing bubbles of swill in the trough,/ each slurp a sloppy vowel of hunger." Bristol, Tenn., native Susan O'Dell Underwood creates resonant portraits of a grandmother's house "pregnant with cousins" and of a softball game played by farmboys, portraits that owe more to Whitman than to any postmodern influence.

Southern writers, especially Tennesseans, should keep both *HomeWords* and *HomeWorks* close at hand for easy reference to this state's state of the art. For all other readers, the rewards will be self-evident.

— Toney Frazier

An avid reader and critic of contemporary fiction and culture, Toney Frazier is a free-lance writer and editor and a lifelong resident of Tennessee.

Books Worth Mentioning

Belled Buzzards, Hucksters, & Grieving Specters/Appalachian Tales: Strange, True & Legendary by Gary Carden and Nina Anderson (Asheboro, N.C.: Down Home Press, 1994; $13.95 paper). This eclectic collection features newspaper accounts; fascinating, often humorous stories of natural phenomena; and folk tales about people and places with odd claims to fame. In addition, the authors blend in recollections of famous, infamous, and unusual individuals from Western North Carolina. Carden, a professional storyteller, contributes more than 20 of the 36 tales. Suitable for reading aloud to people who readily drop their jaws.

The Christmas Letters by Lee Smith (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1996; $12.95 paper). Smith has written an epistolary novella constructed from funny, poignant holiday letters, spanning over 50 years and three generations of Birdie Pickett's family. Full of family history and drama (explicit as well as between the lines) and recipes.

Laughter in Appalachia (1987), *Curing the Cross-Eyed Mule: Appalachian Mountain Humor* (1989), *Hometown Humor, U.S.A.* (1991), and *More Laughter in Appalachia* (1995) by Loyal Jones and Billy Edd Wheeler (Little Rock, Ark.: August House; $12.95 paper). Four perennially bestselling collections of Southern Appalachian humor collected from West Virginia Liars' Contests, other regional festivals, and individuals. One-liners, anecdotes, and longer stories elicit grins, guffaws, and groans. Homegrown remedies for the dour.

New Stories from the South: The Year's Best, 1996 edited by Shannon Ravenel (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1996; $10.95 paper). Ravenel has collected 15 short stories, reprinted from 1995 American magazines. The volume includes Lee Smith's "The Happy Memories Club," about a senior citizen rejected by her writers' group for wanting to write "real memories" instead of exclusively sunny ones, and Robert Morgan's "The Balm of Gilead Tree," about an airplane crash as seen by a looter (humorous only to twisted readers).

The Preacher Joke Book by Loyal Jones. (Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1988; $7.95 paper). Church folk jokes, sermon parodies, church bulletin misprints, Baptists vs. Methodists — gentle jests, stories you can tell the congregation.

Outhouse Humor by Billy Edd Wheeler (Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1988; $7.95 paper). A collection of 300 Southern jokes, stories, songs, and poems that you wouldn't necessarily want to share with the congregation.

Yellow Dogs, Hushpuppies, Bluetick Hounds: The Official Encyclopedia of Southern Culture Quiz Book compiled by Lisa Howorth (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996; $9.95 paper). Organized into categories such as "Manners, Myth, & Religion," "Science, Medicine, Business & Industry," "The Land," and "History, Politics, & Law," Howorth's book includes enough Q&As about Appalachia to create your own trivial pursuit game—or maybe Southern Appalachian categories for *Jeopardy*.

— Sandra L. Ballard

Book review editor Sandra L. Ballard is associate professor of English at Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn.

Romance Novel Composed on the Steps Between the Knott County Public Library and the James Still Building Hindman, Kentucky

Meeting, fleeting
fluttering, demurring,
sighing, burning,
tumescing, quivering,
heaving, throbbing,
ebbing, glowing,
parting.

—Jane Hicks

Jane Hicks, a Northeast Tennessee native, teaches intellectually gifted students in Sullivan County, Tenn. Her work has been published in Now & Then, Iron Mountain Review, *and* Sow's Ear. *She is working on a book of short stories.*

Randall Hylton

Randall Hylton

At 6 feet 6 inches, Randall Hylton is surely one of the tallest songwriter/guitar-playing comedians in the world.

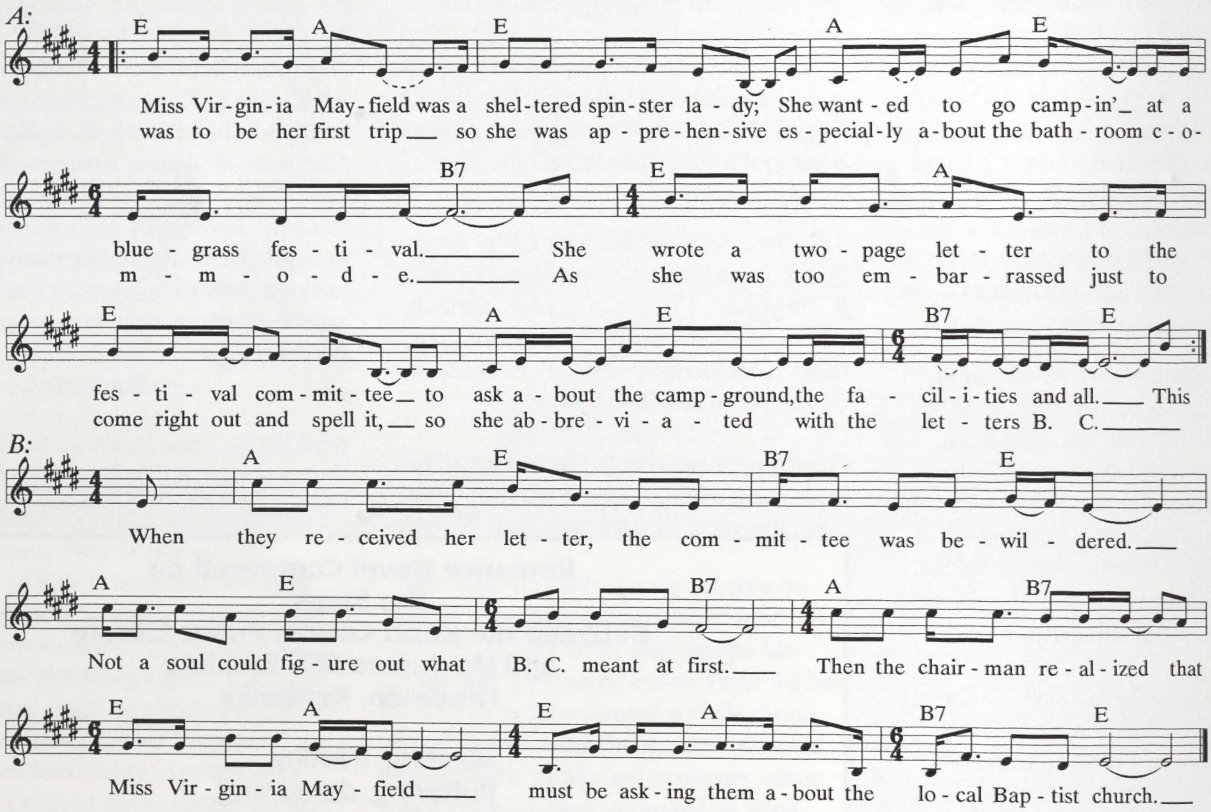
Hylton graduated from Virginia Tech in 1968 with a degree in accounting. One tax season drove him to bluegrass. He has been writing bluegrass songs for a number of years, including "Room at the Top of the Stairs," "42 Acres of Bottom Land," "Gonna be Movin'," and dozens of others. More than 120 of his songs have been recorded by artists as diverse as country singer Vern Gosdin, gospel stalwarts The Lewis Family, contemporary fingerstyle guitarist Leo Kottke, and bluegrass pioneer Lester Flatt.

Many deal with humorous topics, such as "Ms. Virginia Mayfield and the B.C." The song is based on a story written by a fan, Kingsport, Tenn., native Doyle Hurd. It came out of an "endless quest to make my performances entertaining," explains Hylton. A fine finger-pick guitarist, he still performs at festivals and other venues solo, a bluegrass rarity.

This song is taken from the recording *Pickin' in the Parlor*, recorded live at the Bluegrass Parlor in Tampa, Fla., on Copper Creek Records of Roanoke, Va.

— Tim Stafford

Ms. Virginia Mayfield and the B.C.


A:
E A E A E
Miss Vir-gin-ia May-field was a shel-tered spin-ster la-dy; She want-ed to go camp-in'_ at a
was to be her first trip___ so she was ap-pre-hen-sive es-pecial-ly a-bout the bath-room c-o-
B7 E A
blue-grass fes-ti-val._____ She wrote a two-page let-ter to the
m-m-o-d-e._____ As she was too em-bar-rassed just to
E A E B7 E
fes-ti-val com-mit-tee_ to ask a-bout the camp-ground,the fa-cil-i-ties and all.___ This
come right out and spell it,___ so she ab-bre-vi-a-ted with the let-ters B. C._____
B:
A E B7 E
When they re-ceived her let-ter, the com-mit-tee was be-wil-dered.___
A E B7 A B7
Not a soul could fig-ure out what B. C. meant at first.___ Then the chair-man re-al-ized that
E A E A B7 E
Miss Vir-gin-ia May-field____ must be ask-ing them a-bout the lo-cal Bap-tist church.___

A: The chairman wrote a letter, and it said, "My dear Ms. Mayfield,
Thank you for the interest you have shown in our B.C.
I'll try to put your mind at ease and answer all your questions,
And once you've used our B.C., I'm sure you'll be relieved.

A: Our B.C. sits on the right just nine miles down the highway.
It will seat two hundred, even more with folding chairs.
The last time that I went was a month ago last Sunday.
It was so crowded I stood up the whole time I was there.

A: Some of our folks pack their lunch and make a whole day of it.
It pains me that I can't find time to go more regularly.
It might interest you to know the B.C. crowd keeps growing.
But we have planned a potluck supper to help us buy more seats.

B: So, Ms. Virginia Mayfield, when you pull into our campground,
Tell the people at the gate to call me on the phone.
And I will have my wife, Moselle, to go with you the first time.
We'll both be glad to sit with you and make you feel at home."

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Ballet in Blue

In the Goodyear Tire Center
a Thunderbird rises, black,
lifts silent as a cloud.
The muted clang of steel

sings once in opening: an explosive
hiss punctuates the separation of
tire from wheel. And thus it starts.
On the far side of the big room

a bar of sun works its thick way
across old cobwebs through a high
window overhead: it is a soft
spotlight on mechanical progress.

The men in blue move fluidly.
Lift, hold, move —
they are silent with their thoughts,
the lugnuts, the wrenches, as they

spin-balance tires and change oil.
So much is manifest in this
non-choreographed ballet in blue!
The correctness of putting things to right

holds them steady in their own
delicate balance, smooth as a deer
leaping a high fence bounding a dewy
garden of young corn at dawn.

— Arthur J. Stewart

Arthur J. Stewart is a senior research staff member and aquatic ecologist at the Oak Ridge (Tenn.) National Laboratory. He has had poems published in various anthologies. Stewart lives and writes in Lenoir City, Tenn.

Tattoos and Babies

I overhear the clerk
at the Sears store say
the pain was so bad she
had to chew on a sock.
I nod knowingly,
thinking of the morning
when my sac broke water
and they wheeled me down
the hall to the delivery room.
No sock to chew on but
ice cubes, I panted
I think I can
I think I can
like the little blue
engine and fixed
on a photo of I don't
remember what to distract me.
The pain, the clerk says
and bags the buy,
then lifts a hem,
delivering butterflies
tattooed on her foot.

— Kathleen Hellen

Kathleen Hellen lives in Princeton, W.Va. Her short stories and poems have been widely published. In 1994 and 1996, she won the James Still Poetry Award from the Appalachian Writers Association.

East Tennessee State University is one of 46 institutions in the Tennessee Board of Regents system, the seventh largest system of higher education in the nation. The Tennessee Board of Regents is the governing board for this system which is comprised of six universities, 14 community colleges, and 26 area technology centers. The TBR system enrolls 80 percent of all Tennessee students attending public institutions of higher education.

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Alice Anthony's "Cats"

People often ask photographer Alice Anthony of Johnson City, Tenn., "How in the world did you get that cat to do that?" Anyone who knows cats knows, of course, that Anthony didn't get "that cat" to do anything. She took note of the fact that Casey was fond of lounging on the car hood and would yawn from time to time. She also noticed that the light hit the car just right in the late afternoon. Put it all together — then add in a good bit of patience — and "Cats" was the result.

ALICE ANTHONY

NOW & THEN
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